Harunohi Biyori
春の日びより
illust. ひたきゆう
乙女ゲームのヒロインで
—otome game no heroine de saikyo survival—
最強サバイバルV
otome game no
heroine de
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Illustrations

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最強サバイバルV
TOブックス

シエル・ワールド
サース大陸
MAP
otome game no heroine de saikyo survival
■ 主要大都市
★ 大規模ダンジョン
コンドール王国
イルズ公国
ソルホース王国
クレイデール王国
大森林
魔物生息域
獣人国

characters

フェルド

お人好しな凄腕冒険者。幼いアリアに最初に戦闘スキルを教えた人物。

ヴィーロ

冒険者。凄腕斥候。アリアを気に入り、暗部騎士のセラに引き合わせた。

セラ

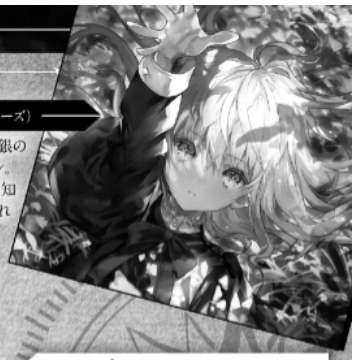
メルローズ辺境伯直属、暗部の上級騎士（戦闘侍女）。アリアを戦闘メイドとして鍛えた。

サマンサ

凄腕魔導士。『虹色の剣』創始者の一人。どこまでボケているのかは不明。

グレイブ

狂信的に国家の安寧を願う、元暗部統括の上級技士。現在、行方不明中。



アリア（本名：アーリシア・メルローズ）

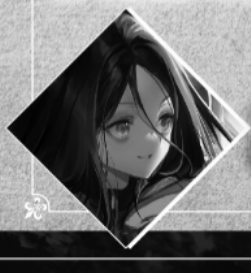
本作の主人公。乙女ゲーム『銀の翼に恋をする』の本来のヒロイン。転生者に殺されかけた事で「知識」を得た。生き抜くためであれば、殺しも厭わない。

エレーナ

クレイデール王国の第一王女。乙女ゲームの悪役令嬢だが、アリアにとっては同志のような存在。誇り高く、友情に厚い。

クララ

ダンドール辺境伯直系の姫であり転生者。乙女ゲームの悪役令嬢の一人。アリアを賛成している。



カルラ

レスター伯爵家の令嬢。乙女ゲームにおける最凶最悪の悪役令嬢。アリアと殺し合いたいと考えている。

characters

False Heroine

Royal Sorcery Academy. Only those who had reached 13 years old this year and were related to nobility were permitted to enroll into the academy. The majority of noble sons and daughters would enroll into this academy. It was an education establishment with the longest history in Claydale Kingdom.

The reason of its establishment at the beginning was to make noble sons and daughters with huge capacity of mana to learn how to control it. But at the present time, more than a hundred years since Dandall and Melrose, the former neighboring dukedoms had been absorbed into the kingdom. In the past the difference in asset that each noble house possessed cause difference in education between nobles to occur. In order to fill that gap and raise the quality of the whole country from the foundation, the academy was turning into an education body where nobility went through the compulsory education for three years.

Speaking of that sorcery academy, the hot topic there for these several years was about the crown prince Ervan who enrolled last year. The gossipy people talked about how he was a gentle prince who lacked ambition, but last year he got three fiancées from influential noble houses within the country and the basis of his authority was starting to be formed smoothly.

At the year when Ervan enrolled, the daughter of Duke Fudale, Patricia who was considered as the one who would be the third queen in the future was also still there as a third year, the highest year in the academy. The daughter of Margrave Dandall, Clara who was considered as the one who would be the first queen in the future also enrolled at the same year. That year became quite an exciting year inside the academy.

But this year, the academy would surely become even more festive with the arrival of the new students.

Many nobles who wanted to get closer with the royal family gave birth to children at the next year after the crown prince Ervan was born, so this year the academy would be blessed with many more students than the average year. In addition, outstanding girls that couldn't be found in ordinary year like for example Ervan's little sister the first princess Elena, or the daughter of Count Lester, Carla who was considered as the one who would be the second queen in the future were also passing through the gate of sorcery academy at the same period.

.

Waa, how lovely! So this is the academy that will become my "stage" from today!

The beginning of the year was when the high society season opened. Among the many students heading to the opening ceremony, a single girl who was accompanied by a boy in butler uniform was walking excitedly at the center of the open path.

She had reddish dark blond hair and blue eyes.

Nobles tended to grow up quickly due to their mana, but this girl had petite body which made her looked conspicuously younger compared to other students. Coupled with her behavior that lacked any calm, the impression that she gave off was like a fledgling chick.

That "girl" clearly looked like "odd" to the students who had been raised as noble since they were born.

Her features should be more accurately described as adorable rather beautiful.

She had large eyes with droopy corners which made her looked somewhat sleepy. Coupled with her petite body, even though the length of her skirt would make other noble lady called her "shameless", she gave off a mysterious atmosphere that would make others thought that "it can't be helped if it's her".

「Seo-kun, please look! I'm going to enroll into a splendid academy like this! How wonderful!」

「My lady, please calm down-, let's walk closer to the side. Also, if you can let go of my arm……」

The butler who was a Cruzian boy had his arm tightly held by the girl. He muttered those words with a troubled expression.

The middle of the path was empty so that the path would be clear for the high class nobles who were riding on carriage. The low and middle class nobles were intentionally avoiding that part of the path.

The boy——Seo was warning the girl because he felt the criticizing gazes on them. But the girl strengthened her hold on the arm of Seo who was trying to get out of her grasp, and then she cautioned Seo who was one year younger than her with the air like a big sister.

「That's no good Seo-kun. Like I keep telling you, use the pet name [Licia] when calling me. After all we are already like *family*, so don't act like a strange like that.」

「……My apologies.」

Someone with positive thinking might perceive the scene as [a lady who treated even servant like family], but the girl's coquettish tone and the sense of distance that was scandalous for noble youths put the girl with childish look in an alluring light.

The out-of-place scene and awkward mood started to gather the attention of the surrounding students. It was then a black coated carriage arrived. A black haired young lady wearing a deep blue dress and a crimson robe over it came down from it.

Even students who didn't know "her" identity got overwhelmed by her abnormal atmosphere and sickly appearance and they got out of her way in a hurry. Then she calmly formed her words toward Seo and the girl who were in front of her.

「——You're in the way——」

The "atmosphere" changed in that moment. The *color* of the stage was blotted out.

That voice wasn't a loud yell or a weak whisper. It was just a voice with normal volume, and yet it drowned out the surrounding voices.

Seo sensed the vast mana from that girl that was accompanied by an overflowing "killing intent". He stepped forward in order to protect his mater the girl. Seeing his action, that girl put on a smile that was like thin ice.

「Move aside. You might accidentally get burned if you're blocking the way like that you know?」

「M-my deepest apologies-」

Seo obediently bowed his head toward the young lady who was giving them such dangerous warning. He did that not because he realized that the other side was a daughter of a high class noble, but because his survival instinct was driving him to act like that in the presence of the strong.

But, there was also someone who didn't feel that.

「This street is big you know? If you want to pass through then there's still a lot of space left over.」

The girl said that with a wide smile. She said that not as an argument but as though she was simply stating the obvious. It caused Seo's brown skin to turn pale, while the young lady's eyes that were surrounded with dark circles were narrowed as though she had discovered an unusual "toy".

Seo and the other watchers turned pale seeing that. At this rate something *not good* would definitely happen. While everyone was thinking like that——

.

「What is going on here!」

A male student who was accompanied by several students appeared from the direction of the opening ceremony's venue and broke that place's chilling atmosphere. He cut in between the two sides to act as mediator.

The boy was wearing a dress suit like and a crimson robe over it like a knight. He saw that young lady who was facing the girl and her butler and his eyes widened just a little.

「……Carla? What are you doing at this kind of place?」

「How do you do in this fine day, Er-sama. My fiancée didn't come to accompany me, so I arrived here by myself just now.」

「That's……forgive me. I had to prepare to give a greeting as the senior student representative so……」

The crown prince Ervan averted his gaze as though he was making an excuse. It made the smile of Carla who was one of his fiancées to deepen in delight even more.

「Yes, I don't mind. I shall ask for a suitable compensation later on in exchange but……, you two, how long are you two planning to block my sight and Er-sama?」

「O-our apologies! My lady, this way……」

「Eh, yes. Ah」

When Seo urged the girl, the girl who was staring fixedly on Ervan's face suddenly tripped on her feet and fell *in front of him*——

「Watch out-」

Ervan saw that and reflexively caught the girl.

「……Are you alright?」

「Yes-」

The girl replied. But instead of separating from Ervan, she leaned into her arms even more. Seeing that Carla lost her interest and walked past Ervan's side. Ervan saw that and reflexively called at her.

「Carla, you too are my fiancée, so I ask you to please not speak or act threateningly with the other students……」

Carla stopped walking because of those words and looked back across her shoulder toward Ervan with only her gaze.

「My, I don't know what you are talking about Er-sama.」

「Act with common sense as one of the future queens……」

Carla hid her lips behind a fan and chuckled in respond to that sentence from Ervan.

「I think that I am acting with more common sense compared to a man who is embracing another woman in front of his fiancée though?」

「That's-……」

「Then, have a good day, Er-sama. Let's meet again later. Fufu.」

Carla walked toward the opening ceremony's location with a good mood for some reason. Ervan saw her off with a slightly pained look before he lent a hand to the girl to help her stood up.

「Can you not think badly of her? Perhaps she's in a slightly bad mood……」

「Yes, I'm fine-. I'm used to it after all-」

Ervan tore away the girl who was saying such strange thing and entrusted her to the young butler. It was then he finally saw the girl's face clearly from the front.

「I have done you many discourtesies. Are you perhaps a new student?」

「Yes-! I'm enrolling into this academy starting from this year-!」

The girl stepped away a little from him and pinched the bottom of her short skirt with her fingers. Then she courtesied which caused more of her white thighs to be exposed while giving a smile like a flower.

.

「I am Alicia Mercis! My best regards, please take care of me from now, senpai-!」

It was the meeting between the weak hearted but kind prince and the young lady who was ignorant of the world.

The scene was like a “stage” that was written by “someone”. Princes Elena who came down from her carriage while holding my hand was watching that scene in exasperation with cold eyes.

「Let’s go Aria.」

「Yes, Elena-sama.」

That young lady got her hand pulled by Seo and he forcefully dragged her toward the auditorium where the opening ceremony would be held. Carla who chased them away noticed us and sent a meaningful thin smile toward us. Then she walked toward the direction of the auditorium without even a single person accompanying her.

「……She hasn’t changed at all.」

「True. That is her flaw and also her virtue. She is a really problematic character, but just this time I want to sympathize with her.」

The little sister was staring with a cold gaze toward her big brother who not only was incapable to refuse the advance of the girl just now, he was also incapable to criticize the girl’s insolence, and not only that, he was defeated by the girl’s pushiness. That big brother, Ervan finally noticed the gaze and entrusted the two people who came with him to deal with the surrounding before approaching us.

It seemed the companies of the crown prince Ervan were both high class noble, but I remembered seeing one of them from somewhere. It seemed that person also came to the same realization. He left the task of holding back the surrounding to the other person, a red haired boy, and stared at me with a dazed expression.

「Elena-」

「How do you do, Onii-sama. You should be busy right now. Is your preparation already finished?」

「No, ……I'm sorry that I couldn't pick you up.」

It seemed that Carla's sarcasm from just now was effective. He bowed his head awkwardly. That gesture made Elena's gaze to instantly turn dangerous.

「Onii-sama……a crown prince of all people mustn't lower his head so easily even if it's toward his little sister. You don't need to do that, I don't mind it at all.」

「……Is that so?」

In her previous *political* setting, Elena was a little sister who was so attached to her big brother and idolized him so much that she would get jealous to other girl who approached him, but the necessity to do that had lessened at this time, so her involvement with the crown prince faction itself was also weakening.

But, Ervan still hadn't realized that Elena's behavior from before was just a setting. He was making an expression that looked slightly bewildered from the change in his little sister.

「We were always together until several years ago. This makes me feel a bit lonely……did something happen?」

「No, Onii-sama. I'm simply becoming a bit more mature.」

「I see……. By the way, *she* became your servant Elena?」

His gaze slightly glanced toward me. In respond I wordlessly bowed toward him.

「It's something like that. Please don't take her away from me okay? After all Onii-sama already has Clara and Carla right?」

「You're……right.」

Ervant nodded a little with conflicted expression in respond to Elena's words.

The unknown last [Gift holder] from the dungeon was the daughter of Margrave Dandall, Clara who became the lead fiancée of the crown prince. She officially became the [lead fiancée] was mainly because of that achievement. That was what I heard from Elena.

Carla also obtained a [Gift], but she was appointed as the second fiancée, which was something that couldn't be helped because she had that kind of personality. The expression that Ervan made when he heard Carla's name was slightly different than before.

「Well then, I too have to give a greeting in the opening ceremony as the new student representative, so I shall take my leave now. I hope that Onii-sama too will do well with your own greeting later. Let's go, Aria.」

「As your highness command.」

「Ye……yeah. Do your best too Elena.」

I also bowed toward the crown prince's slightly bewildered group before following behind Elena. We were gathering a lot of gazes from them and the surrounding.

A lot of people would surely realize Elena's talent in the not far future. Until then Elena needed to deepen her connection with the influential

nobles just like until now, and at the same time she needed to win over the capable people inside the academy to her faction.

Even so it might result in increasing the number of her enemy if she rushed it too much. There would also be those who wanted to get closer with Elena even if they had to use forceful method for that. In case something like that happened, it would be my job to remove those people.

While I was thinking about such thing, Elena seemed to guess what was in my mind and whispered with a small voice.

I'll leave it to you, Aria. I'll turn a blind eye to what you do as long as you don't cross the line.

Roger.

I muttered that with a voice that only she could hear and reverently bowed my head as her highness the princess's "close attendant".

Reunion at the Opening Ceremony

One year had passed since that dungeon exploration. Currently Elena and I enrolled with the academy as fellow new student.

——Acting as bodyguard for three years inside the sorcery academy——.

That was the request that Elena made to me who was an adventurer.

The detail of the contract had been worked out with Dalton and the others too, but the general outline of the contract was as aforementioned below.

First——.

Guarding the first princess Elena inside the academy starting from when she enrolled into the academy for three years until she graduated.

The duration of the contract was for three years, but shortening the contract would be considered in case a big problem of the royal family got taken care of. According to Elena's thinking, apparently the majority of the problem would get solved if the crown prince graduated after two years. I would be bound by contract for a long period, but I would be allowed to work as adventurer if Elena gave her permission.

Second——.

Removing danger inside the academy.

If my strength was needed for the safety of the royal family including the crown prince, not just Elena, I would be allowed to use force. To be more specific it included the arrest of noble whose crime was certain, and also removing threat with force. To do that I would be temporarily bestowed with the authority of [Black Ops' high ranked combat maid] like Sera.

Third——.

Viro would also get inserted into the academy during my activity inside the academy.

This wasn't something that I asked for, but apparently the tasks of gathering information inside the academy and giving me support and the like were entrusted to Viro who was tentatively going to join the Black Ops. Because of that this request was a separate matter from the princess's request to me individually. It was also a request from the black ops to the "Rainbow Sword".

Fourth——.

Because I would guard Elena during class too, I enrolled into the academy not as servant or maid, but as her classmate.

This was the biggest problem for me. In order for me to enroll into the sorcery academy where only noble could enroll, I ended up becoming an [adopted daughter] of Sera's Leyton Baronet House.

I wondered whether such thing would really get permitted, but according to what I heard, this was apparently a publicly allowed trick to make a child with good prospect into the adopted child of a subordinate noble house when a student from high ranked noble house wanted to bring an attendant who was close to their age to the academy.

But, the adoption in such case was temporary. In case the child showed that they had no prospect, the adoption would be dissolved after graduation. In case they showed prospect, they would stay as the adopted child of the low ranked noble and worked for the high ranked noble.

To be honest, my impression about noble wasn't so good, but if it was necessary in order to protect Elena then I'd accept it.

If I had to become noble then I thought it should be fine even if I become Dalton's adopted child, but his title as noble was limited to his generation only, so his relative wouldn't be considered as noble.

.

After that discussion, I was able to obtain some time to move around freely.

Serjura
I returned once to master's place and got scolded for fighting against rank 6. After that master trained me in light sorcery saying that it would become necessary later. I also asked her to check my newly obtained Battle Skill [Iron Rose]. Master seemed to be interested with it too.

The next person who I visited was Galbas. I handed the special material to him and asked him to strengthen my weapon.

While I was there I also asked him about Gil and Shuri's condition. It seemed the two joined an adventurer party of their acquaintance and they were getting trained there. I felt a bit relieved to hear that.

I spent time like that until things calmed down, and then I became Sera's adopted daughter in the capital and got educated to be the princess's close attendant.

I got reunited with Seo after so long during that time. He got really depressed when he learned that he was shorter than me and that I had become his big sister although it was only because of the temporary adoption.

.

And now, I was observing the opening ceremony from the side stage.

There was no grouping in this academy. The budget and curriculum for education of each noble house were different, so it would be pointless to teach everyone the same thing together.

For low ranked noble, the academy was a place for them to improve themselves until they reached the required education standard, and to show off their capability to other people there. For high ranked noble, the academy was a place for them to learn about society and politic, and to find capable people.

And so, there was no need for [class division] into more than ten classes like in that woman's "knowledge", but there was a clear "division" among the students who participated in the opening ceremony.

The high ranked nobles who were few in number occupied the special seats at the front row, while the low ranked nobles who were only great in number occupied the back rows. Their positioning were neatly divided by their rank.

I too originally should attend the opening ceremony from the seat of low ranked noble, but I was the princess's close attendant, and I was appointed as bodyguard by [royal family's decree], so there was no need for me to appear in the opening ceremony.

There isn't anyone who look noticeably suspicious……but

Even from the side stage, it was clear to see that the presence of Elena and Carla in the auditorium was a cut above the rest.

There were more than 6000 low ranked noble houses and nearly 600 middle ranked noble houses. In contrast there were only 36 new students that came from high ranked noble houses including the royal family. Their number was already extremely few, and yet nobody dared to approach them, which caused an empty area to be created around them.

Student who stood out other than them was only that girl at the seating for middle ranked noble who was being protected by Seo.

That girl who had the name [Alicia] like me was too innocent……she was throwing around her charm at the male students around her with the cheerfulness that didn't read the mood at all.

……It felt like I had met her somewhere in the past. I especially felt a bit of déjà vu at the way she was looking for protection only from boys like that. Perhaps that was because I felt something "out of place" from her behavior.

.

The ceremony progressed and the crown prince Ervan finished giving his greeting toward the new students. After that Elena finished her greeting as the new student representative.

There was no sign of anything suspicious around Elena. The securities wouldn't even imagine that there would be anyone who tried something in this kind of public place, but Elena and I were on our guard not only against the nobles of the noble faction.

We were on our guard because Grave who declared that he would attack the princess was hiding somewhere in this country.

Even Grave wouldn't be so foolish to attack Elena in the palace that had strict security. That was why I was thinking that the chance was high that he would make his attempt while Elena was staying in this academy.

Elena walked down from the stage after she finished her speech. I used that timing to slip among the academy servants to return to her side. It was then "someone" tried to grab my hand to stop me.

Wait, you're——

In that instant, I performed body strengthening in a single breath and slapped away that hand. Then I swept that *attacker*'s feet and thrust my hidden weapon between the man's eyes when he fell on the ground.

I turned my half-narrowed eyes toward that familiar face. He was the man who I caught sight behind the crown prince this morning. He squeezed out his voice even while he looked like he was enduring the pain.

「……I wanted to meet you.」

「……」

I couldn’t understand what his words actually meant. I drew out my memory of him from inside my mind.

「If I remember correctly……you are an entourage of his highness the crown prince. And why are someone like you trying to make contact with me?」

「We had also met before! At the capital together with Er……his highness and the adventurer bodyguards-! ……Do you not remember me?」

「……I remember.」

The noble boys who became the impetus of my reunion with Feld. One of the boys who was together with the crown prince and tried really hard to talk with me right from the start was him.

「I heard from Er that you are with the “Rainbow Sword” and that you’ve become a strong adventurer. I tried to meet you but I couldn’t because you are under her highness’s protection……. Why are someone like you became noble and her highness’s close attendant!?」

He tried to get up in excitement even while I was pushing him down. I shut him up with my killing intent and hidden weapon.

「I’m the one asking question here.」

There was no guarantee that someone close to the crown prince definitely belonged to the royal family faction. Even if he was an ally, what was his reason to approach me when we had only met once in the past?

I put even more killing intent into my gaze in order to find that out. In respond he gritted his teeth to endure that and met my gaze with a strong will in his eyes.

「I am Mihail Melrose of Melrose House that is in control of Claydale Kingdom’s [black ops]. Are you still going to point your blade at me after knowing that?」

「……Very well.」

I quietly pulled away the blade from him after hearing that “family name”.

Melrose……the family that the spirit said might be related to me by blood.

When Sera talked to me about the adoption, I heard how Melrose house was the main house that Leyton House served but……for that name to come out here. Furthermore it was a margrave house that was in control of the black ops, which meant it was a major house in the same level of Dandall.

It looked like Elena had stopped the information about me from spreading, but if it Melrose House was in control of black ops just like he said, it wouldn't be strange if my information leaked out from Sera's surrounding.

His answer was different from my expectation, but I decided that it would be hasty to turn him into my enemy just because he was a [Melrose].

I would need to investigate a little to make sure his story checked out, but if he was someone from black ops then he was an ally *at present*.

I separated from him soundlessly and tidied up my messed up skirt while standing up. Then I offered my hand to Mihail who was on the ground. He was staring fixedly at me the whole time and his hand was about to take my hand for an instant, but then he pulled it back and averted his blushing face.

「I can stand on my own. ……Kuh」

Mihail's face distorted in agony when he tried to stand up. I didn't really know how to hold back against ordinary person so I might have cracked his bone somewhere. I formed magic inside my head and pointed my hand to Mihail.

「——High Heal——」

The light that came out healed his body. Mihail looked at me with surprise and stood up. Then he checked that there was nothing wrong with his body before exhaling as though to let out the murkiness inside himself.

「Thank you……I guess. That strength……as expected are you her highness's bodyguard? Did you switch profession from adventurer to black ops?」

「The request came through the black ops, but my employer is Elena-sama herself. I am not a member of the “black ops” under your control. If you wish to know any more than that then please ask her directly.」

Mihail’s eyes widened slightly when he heard the word [request] from my mouth.

「So her highness has recruited you. I heard that a member of Rainbow Sword had obtained a special power but, don’t tell me that person is you……?」

「Don’t ask any question. If you are really the person who you claim to be, you will be able to obtain that information on your own right? Also I’ll apologize for pushing you down but, I recommend that you stop trying to touch other person’s body suddenly from now on.」

「That was-, ……I apologize.」

I didn’t know what the custom was in the world of nobility, but if he did something like that in the underworld, it was no different than showing hostility.

Perhaps Mihail had his reason for doing that, but he obediently bowed his head to apologize with a red face.

I didn’t know which part of my words would cause him to go red like that but, there was also a part of my action that went a bit too far so surely it would be better for both of us to forget this matter already.

「Then, later. One day we might meet again for work.」

「W-wait a second-」

I turned my back to him to walk away, but he called out to me so I turned toward him just a little. For some reason Mihail looked nervous and then he opened his mouth after steeling himself.

「Can you……tell me your name?」

「……Aria.」

「I……see. You're "Aria".」

He muttered that and smiled just a little. From that face it felt like I could catch a slight glimpse of similarity with "mother", just a little. Even though they were different in gender and age……was this because of "blood relationship"?

Did he also sense something similar from me? My figure was reflected on his eyes, but it was like he was seeing someone else through me. That was the feeling that I got.

「Aria……I'll give you a little bit of information as "black ops". In this academy, the students from house of baron and higher rank will have to go to a field trip to observe a knight order's exercises outside the academy immediately after enrollment. Her highness will most likely have to participate in this activity too. The black ops wish to act as security too in this activity, but this time it will be the knight order that get to be in charge of the security, so the black ops will act as support. ……Be careful.」

「……Understood.」

Knight order, black ops, these two organizations protected this country from the surface and from behind the scene. They were the sword and the shield of the country and the royal family.

But if……the crown prince and Elena got into a feud with each other, I wonder "which side" they would choose.

Royal Sorcery Academy

「……Haa……haa……」

A girl was clasping her hand together as though in a prayer inside a room where the lacey curtain was closed tightly. She then separated her hands and exhaled her breath roughly.

The window was made from glass, a rare thing even in this world that developed with sorcery and alchemy in the place of science. Even a slightly distorted small glass should cost one gold coin. A glass with the size that was sufficient for a window that covered almost half the wall of a room could only exist in the mansion of a very influential noble.

Even the maids had been shut out from inside this spacious room. The girl calmed her breathing, soaked the tip of his pen with ink, then she started scribbling on one of the papers that were scattered around.

Knock knock……

「——My lady Clara. His highness is coming to visit, will you go meet him?」

「……Please let his highness pass.」

The maid asked for permission from outside the room. Clara paused for a moment before she gave such reply.

Several minutes later, Ervan was allowed to enter by himself under the justification that it was the visit of the lady's fiancée. He saw Clara who was still continuing to write roughly that the table that was made from white stone became dirtied from the ink. He hurriedly ran to her side.

「Clara-, you mustn't do this, you have to rest.」

「Er-sama, can't we put a stop to the field trip for observing the knights' exercises? As I thought, the result of [danger] keeps coming out no matter how many times I divined it.」

「Clara……you used your Gift again.」

The Gift that Clara obtained from the spirit was called [Foresight].

That ability could guess what would happen in the future with high probability, but this ability was a bit different from the [Premonition] that most people imagined.

The true nature of this ability was that it applied calculation and close scrutiny to the information of the current situations that Clara possessed and picked out the information that had high accuracy. That information than was used for even more calculation to draw out a [Foresight] that had a big probability of coming true.

What Clara sought was the ability to [know the options like in otome game]. The amazing part of this ability was that even if she herself didn't know whether an information was right or wrong, the ability could pick out the information that had high degree of accuracy based from the situation.

Clara combined that with the knowledge of her past life and the information of [otome game events] that originally she should have no way of knowing to perform a Foresight with high degree of accuracy.

But using this "Gift" demanded "compensation".

There would be no problem if she used the ability for simple things like [tomorrow's weather] or [the dinner's menu], but human's action was hard to predict and if she tried to predict what would happen in several weeks about something that involved many people, tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of calculations would be performed in her brain and each time that happened would inflict a considerable damage to Clara's brain. This ability was steadily shortening her lifespan as human.

「You can't use that ability too much. Besides it was you yourself Clara who said that [the future is constantly changing]. Because of your [Foresight], we have made request to the knight order and also elite bodyguards to be on guard, so surely everything will be okay.」

「But……」

But in the game, Ervan often [got involved with the heroine] when he fell into danger.

An event in game that would happen every time in every route was [the field trip outside the academy]. The difficulty level of the "danger" that occurred there would change depending on the capture targets' positivity level. Many things could happen there from the easiest situation like [the attack of man-eating bear] to the hardest difficulty of [demon race's attack].

Clara hadn't seen the heroine directly, but she had ordered her subordinate to check on the heroine. Based on the report, she didn't think that the heroine had raised that much positivity level, but the worst possibility could still happen.

The knight order would be there and the son of the supreme knight commander, Clara's big brother would also be there, so there wouldn't be any problem if what happened was only something like bear attack, but if something with high difficulty happened and the heroine didn't *conveniently* awaken her light element and subsequently obtained [Sacred Magic], there was a chance that even Ervan would get seriously injured.

But, Clara couldn't make too much demand, like adding even more knights from knight order to be guards just because she wanted to [avoid a game event with heroine from occurring].

Clara hesitated to speak and looked depressed. It made Ervan embraced her and pushed her head lightly on his chest.

「Er……sama?」

「Don’t look so anxious like that. This might be strange for me to say but, you see, I like the current hardworking and earnest Clara more than the perfect lady Clara in the past. That’s why, I’ll definitely come back safely for your sake.」

「……yes.」

The previous [perfect villainess lady] Clara became weaker after remembering the memory of her past life. Because of that she managed to close the distance with Ervan who also held weakness like her, but then Clara who had grown unstable felt Ervan’s warmth. But rather than making her felt reassured, it fanned up her uneasiness instead.

Ervan’s weakness was the proof of his low strength. How would he change when someone like him encountered danger and witnessed the heroine’s strength?

The girl whose outer appearance wasn’t similar with the [heroine] and acted more proactively than even the original heroine, was she really the heroine?

The [pink haired girl] with abnormal combat strength who appeared once more as Elena’s bodyguard, was she really not the heroine?

Either way, if the heroine was awakened to the Sacred Magic and became the [Saint], there would be no future where Clara could become happy with Ervan except by harming the heroine.

.

……*ding ding*

Ervan’s visit lasted for an hour before he returned home. After that Clara rang her hand bell to summon her maid.

「Hilda, gather *everyone.*」

「……As you command.」

One maid appeared and obeyed her master's command. She called the three maids who served as Clara's personal servants in the academy.

「From now I'll have the three of you investigate the daughter of Count Mercis, Alicia Mercis. You understand what I *mean* by that aren't you?」

「Of course, Clara-sama.」

「We haven't forgotten our gratitude to you for picking us up.」

「We will definitely be of use to you.」

「……Yes.」

The maid Hilda answered first before the three maids answered in succession after her. But even though they were in the academy, Clara was still the main candidate to be the first queen in the future, and yet her close attendants made a somewhat boorish impression.

「……Bibi, are you still feeling pain?」

「……No, it just feel a bit hurt when I move, my lady.」

The black haired girl who was called Bibi shook her head a little without looking at Clara's eyes. This person was originally already someone of a few words, but she was even more taciturn right now due to her condition that still wasn't at her best as could be seen from the slight "burn" mark that peeked out from her sleeve and collar, though the injury was gradually vanishing due to [Cure] treatment on her.

「For my lady's sake……we will kill her.」

Bibi replied with halting words. The other three also nodded quietly in agreement.

All of Clara's close attendants here were people she found thanks to her Gift——Foresight. They were "assassins" from the former north frontier district branch.

When she found them, Hilda was seriously injured on her stomach, while Bibi was heavily burned on several parts of her body.

They got into a battle with an adventurer called “Ash Crowned Princess” in an abandoned mine near the capital. There Bibi treated Hilda who got seriously injured. That was how the two of them managed to survive even though they got trapped in flame. After that they accidentally found a crack deep inside the abandoned mine and *three people* including the injured managed to escape.

They were able to return to the base that they had prepared and hid there, but they were unable to receive any satisfactory treatment and could only wait for their death there. The one who saved them from such fate was Clara who personally came to find them.

The other two maids, Doris and Haiji were also survivors from the former northern frontier district branch, but they were recruited by Clara using Hilda to save their family that got destitute because of the assassin guild branch’s destruction.

Her objective by making these girls her ally was the removal of the heroine.

And then――

「Will you be able to make contact with *those people*?」

「Yes, Clara-sama. *That person* is moving behind the scene to take care of that. ……Either way, she won’t be able to show herself in front of other people because of her appearance after all.」

「True……」

Clara didn’t say much and simply nodded seeing the complicated expression of Hilda who had gotten betrayed by “her” once.

She survived thanks to her mythril equipment and resentment even after getting her whole body burned in flame. She was living only with her hatred toward “Ash Crowned Princess”.

(……That girl)

The pink haired girl――adventurer Aria who was said to have obtained a blessing.

With that power she repelled a rank 6 monster and fought equally against Carla who obtained a Gift.

The girl who possessed the same hair color like the heroine of the otome game [Falling in Love on the Silver Wings]. If that girl was actually really the heroine, it would be difficult to remove her.

She couldn't imagine that girl getting involved with the otome game like the "heroine", but even if she wasn't the otome game heroine, the girl that Melrose House secured would surely appear in front of Clara as "heroine".

At the beginning Clara's objective was to survive……and to avoid getting judged.

But, if the heroine became the saint just like in the story, the holy church and the populace would want to make her become the next queen. Clara who was the princess from an old royal family who was [fitting to be the first queen] would get removed by their political pressure. She finally noticed such possibility with her power of Foresight.

Before she would want to run away if it was possible to run. But……she couldn't run away anymore.

Because Clara had fallen in love with Ervan…….

(……I won't hand over Er-sama to anyone.)

She wouldn't hand him to the heroine or even that pink haired girl. She didn't care no matter what kind of method she had to take in order to do that.

Like that, Clara even used her own lifespan as compensation to walk the same path like the "villainess lady Clara" of the otome game under her own volition.

「Ufufu」

After the opening ceremony finished, that girl let out a meaningful chuckle while rolling on the bed at the dormitory for the middle ranked noble that got assigned to her by the academy.

「Ervan-sama, he was so lovely just like in the “CG”……. They didn’t have the chance to speak much but, Rockwell-sama and Mihail-sama were also lovely. Fufu, of course Seo-kun is also cute though.」

In the academy, almost all the students were living in dormitory.

Even so there was clear difference depending on the house rank. Low rank nobles were assigned a single room in a large mansion that could house ten-odd people. The high ranked nobles each built a mansion where their children could live. For middle-ranked noble like her, there were multiple houses with the same floor plan that the academy had prepared and each student got assigned one of those houses where they could live there with their servant.

――*knock knock*

「My lady, I have finished preparing the bath……」

「I’ll go in later. You can leave now.」

A maid spoke to her from behind the door. The girl’s words for her were curt.

Alicia Mercis……the girl who introduced herself with the pet name [Licia] that she made up by herself. She too was given a maid from Mercis House to take care of her daily necessities other than the butler Seo. But Licia only allowed that maid who was of the same gender like her to take care of the lowest priority matters.

「……I hate woman. I’m cute, so they keep bullying me. But, “you” are different. You are teaching me so many things.」

The girl pulled out a magic stone from the charm bag that was hanging over her chest and lifted it up before her eyes. That magic stone had cracked and only had half of its original size.

When she was seven years old, she found this treasure while cleaning the ditch as part of her public service activity. When her finger got hurt by the stone's chipped part, the magic stone showed her a radiant "future".

The girl had no money, nobody to protect her, and only grey colored future where she could only wish that a nice master would buy her for her pretty face. But then the magic stone showed her [the path to become a princess].

She had already forgotten her own actual name as something trivial.

In order to completely become the original "heroine" who vanished to who know where, Licia copied the heroine's gesture, way of talking, attitude, and even expression that she learned from the magic stone. At present she had even forgotten what her personality was before all these. Licia was completely taking the place of [Alicia].

"Knowledge" that was dyed with the resentment of a woman who lived in the past was flowing into her from inside the magic stone. But, it was her who was deciding how to use and what knowledge to choose.

But the woman in the magic stone was wishing to be chosen by the crown prince and lived a sparkling life.

So annoying……

She slammed the magic stone that was trying to push her into the crown prince route on the edge of the bed. After that only pure information was flowing freshly into her from the wound on her fingertip. Licia nodded in satisfaction.

That's good……after all the one who choose is "me".

The orphan girl who had nothing and lived side by side with death.

The feeling of terror and despair that she felt during that time, even after she became an adopted daughter of a middle ranked noble and became happy, it was still unable to satisfy her endless “hunger”.

Licia’s weapon was only the “knowledge” inside this magic stone and the “pretty face” that was passed down to her from her mother who was a hostess.

For Licia, filling up her unending hunger was more important than even her own life. She enveloped the magic stone with her bloody fingertips as though it was a priceless treasure and quietly prayed.

.

Aa, I want to love……I want to be loved lots and lots

Academy’s Lesson

「Well then, let’s go Aria.」

「Roger.」

The academy had almost the same size like the capital. Here students were using something like public horse carriage to go around in group, but students from middle ranked noble house and above were permitted to use small carriage for their own use. I too got on a horse carriage for two people where the coach seat and the passenger seat were fused together. Then we headed toward the building where today’s class would be held.

Elena’s attire was called as category two uniform. Young ladies from high ranked noble houses were often seen wearing it. She was wearing a dress that didn’t look too lovely and was order made for this day. On top of that she was wearing a crimson robe that was shaped like a mantel.

The general female students wore the category one uniform that reached until their calf and tights. But unlike them, I was wearing the category three uniform that reached until my ankle to show that I was serving a noble.

In this academy high ranked noble was permitted to walk around with two servants accompanying them, while a middle ranked noble could only bring one.

Of course, there were also those who ignored that rule and walked around with a lot of servants and guards to show off, but either way they couldn’t bring them until inside the building, and Elena who was a member of the royal family that should serve as an example from everyone wouldn’t do something like that.

That was why many high ranked nobles tried to have children of close age from their dependant to enroll into the academy to become their child's aide.

In case of Crown Prince Ervan last year, I heard that other than the servants who took care of his daily need, there were also two high ranked nobles in the upper year who served as his aides, then one person in the same year and one person in lower year who enrolled this year acting as his attendants.

In the academy Elena's servant wasn't just me alone. There were also a combat butler Joseph who had been taking care of Elena in the palace too, and a combat maid Chloe who I also knew very well. But Elena who had a lot of ties only brought a low ranked noble like me to be her aide as well as her close attendant.

Even though I was a low ranked noble, I lived in the same mansion with Elena as a maid, but there were ten royal guards taking shift to guard that mansion, so my main work was mainly when we were inside academy building where I stayed at Elena's side as [close attendant] as well as [bodyguard] as well as [classmate].

「……Aria.」

The carriage ran through the path that was emptied by the people who moved aside when they noticed the princess was passing through. Then suddenly Elena spoke up.

「Only his majesty know that my body is healed. Even so a member of the royal family has to display their capability inside the academy regardless of anything, so surely everyone will realize about my condition before long. When that happens, even the noble faction that is staying quiet right now might possibly start scheming again to make me their puppet.」

She was speaking as though to summarize what we had talked about before.

「For the time being I will move while keeping my aim to become the "queen" a secret. On paper it is Onii-sama who will become the next king. Right now this country's internal situation will fall into chaos again like that

time when a daughter of a viscount became the first queen if that stop being the case.

……Then, why?

The way I said it was harsh, but if Elena thought about the country, she shouldn't aim to become the queen and kept assisting the crown prince just like before. That way this country wouldn't fall into chaos.

It was a good thing that Elena's body got healed but……I looked at Elena with that feeling in my eyes. There she was smiling like an actress playing the "villain" role in theater.

It's simple, Aria……it's because just like *I* don't trust that overly kind Otou-sama, I also don't trust Onii-sama.

His majesty couldn't hide his own feeling and made the viscount daughter who he fell in love with into the first queen. That caused an internal problem in the country that was still continuing even now. And then the crown prince who was raised by that first queen was also holding a similar problematic side in him. That was what Elena was thinking.

I will rule this country. But, the members of the noble faction will also realize quickly that I won't simply rule as they want me to. Also, if it become clear that I am attempting to pull down my brother the crown prince from his position, even the nobles in the conservative royal family faction who are my ally right now might turn hostile. Many people will become my enemy. In such situation……will you protect me Aria?

Those words were asked with a small mischievous smile. My expression didn't change and her figure was reflected on my eyes just for a moment.

That's my job.

You're cold like usual.

Elena's smile deepened a little bit even while saying that.

.

We arrived and entrusted the carriage to the building's servant. I escorted Elena into the building. The moment we stepped inside, *murmur*……the students around us started making noise.

Noble youths of certain rank would definitely knew how Elena looked, but they were making noise like this must be because none of them knew who "I" was even though I was someone staying at the princess's side. There were still a lot of people who didn't know about me seeing that I didn't appear during the opening ceremony.

A female student who was accompanying the princess by herself. Seeing that, several students who were keeping each other in check took a step forward, but their feet stopped moving when I lightly looked around at them. Elena chuckled a little seeing that.

「I'm glad you're at my side. I hate annoyance after all. Look at that Aria. They aren't scared of you, instead they are captivated by you.」

「……」

I wondered what she meant by that? I lightly glared at Elena because of her tone that was teasing me about something. Elena couldn't hold herself back anymore and covered her lips while chuckling.

.

「Haa-!」

Bashi-!

Elena’s wooden sword struck the shield that the male student was holding.

We took lesson about government and economy that Elena wished for during the morning. After that we had lunch before taking the practical class for the first time.

The self-defense class mixed boy and girl together. Even if they had no close quarter combat skill, any female from high ranked noble house had been taught self-defense by their house, so none of them were complete amateur.

Even so there were still gap between students based on their physical ability, so it was vanishingly unlikely for a serious sparring match to be held between boy and girl, but girls who aimed to become a female knight or children from noble house that lived along the border should have the skill to at least defeat a wolf.

「Splendid, your highness-」

「Thank you.」

Elena finished the sparring match and wiped her sweat. The male student who blocked her attack as her sparring partner gave her his words of praise with blushing face.

That performance was enough for a princess. She had no need to obtain the Swordsmanship skill.

Elena could also make up some kind of excuse to skip the practical class if she didn't want the fact that her body had been healed to become known.

But the noble faction wouldn't stop with their interference no matter how much Elena wanted to pull away from them. In that case it would be better for Elena to display her own strength in order to show that being their puppet didn't suit someone of her caliber, and to win over as many allies as possible.

The country would fall into chaos if Elena tried to pull away as long as the crown prince Ervan hadn't changed.

Her body getting healed in that dungeon became the trigger for Elena to give up on her naïve big brother. Elena had resolved herself to turn even her big brother's faction, the royal family faction that had outdated thinking into her enemy.

From here on Elena would gradually increase the number of students who followed her by displaying her cleverness and ability to take action, her kingly attributes in the academy. Such sign already started to appear from the male students who sparred with her just now and the other students who were watching.

But, odd fellows would also appear if Elena shined.

「You there! I can't accept that someone of low birth like you can possibly have the ability to be her highness's aide! Have a match against me!」

I was waiting at the side while holding a towel for Elena to wipe her sweat with, without participating in the class. It was then a tall female student wearing knight uniform pointed her wooden sword toward me.

「……」

……It happened unexpectedly soon. Elena and I had anticipated that this kind of situation would occur.

Her highness the princess who didn't even create a group of noble young ladies to be her hanger-on was walking around with only a single close attendant. If that close attendant was someone with age that was close to the princess, other people would guess that she was a candidate to be the princess's close aide in the future. In reality I had become a close aide of a princess who was aiming to become the country's queen, so thing actually wasn't as simple as it appeared, but the surrounding didn't see it like that.

It seemed nobody knew about my background, but if they investigated a little then they should be able to quickly find that Baronet Layton's house only had a son before.

In other words, this person didn't find it amusing that the candidate to become the princess's close aide was an adopted daughter of a low ranked noble.

□Now, what is your answer-, have a match against me!□

The young lady from before sent a glance at Elena while raising her voice to provoke me.

If I remembered correctly, this girl had also gotten mentioned in the black ops' document……she is Lady Sandra, the daughter of Baron Mars I think.

Mars House belonged to the noble faction. During the war against the evil race several dozen years ago, they were recognized for their achievement and got promoted from low ranked noble into baron. They were a martial noble family.

The princess's close aide also served as her bodyguard. She must be thinking that even if she failed to remove me from my position, she might be able to show off her loyalty and strength and became one of Elena's close aide as a guardian knight.

That thinking in itself wasn't mistaken, but if she was a bit more prudent then she should also be able to notice the complicated situation surrounding the crown prince and the princess. Those who already realized that were contacting Elena secretly in order to avoid getting considered as enemy by the crown prince faction.

□□……□□

I turned my gaze toward Elena. Elena frowned while nodding wordlessly.

There was no point in making someone who couldn't read the situation to be her close aide. In the first place, there was no way Elena would choose someone who intentionally insulted the aide that the princess chose herself. After all she also didn't know whether this girl was doing this under her own *volition* or not.

「——W-wait a second!」

The instructor in charge of the lesson noticed the commotion and came running.

But, even though he was an instructor he was just a former knight and a low ranked noble. Sandra came from Mars House that often produced high ranked knight. She was taking a bullish attitude toward the instructor.

「Lady Sandra Mars, what are you doing! Doing something like a personal fight during class is-」

「No, teacher. This is about my pride and my way of living as a noble. There's no way teacher can't understand that as a fellow noble can't you?」

「But still……」

Even then the instructor kept his stance against the baron's daughter Sandra. He desperately tried to stop her. That instructor allowed me to not participate in the class because he knew my true strength. Perhaps he was just trying to stop her while actually it was to stop me.

But there someone who was completely unrelated made an interruption.

「There should be no problem with this. That's how exactly a daughter of Mars House, a noted martial family of our kingdom should act. She should be far more useful than the boorish woman over there. You don't mind do you, Elena?」

That person who butted in and concluded the talk as he pleased turned toward Elena and Sandra with a smile on his handsome face.

「Prince Amor!?」

The instructor kneeled on the spot, while Sandra instantly looked like a lovestruck maiden from the sudden appearance of the handsome young man before she hurriedly bowed.

「……Uncle, why are you here in the academy?」

Elena's eyes widened slightly before she asked that question. Amor turned a gentle gaze to his niece before his lips twisted when he looked at me next.

「From the start an instructor position have been prepared for me here so I can watch over you and Ervan. I thought that there would be nothing to worry about with you Elena, but as I thought, there are a lot of dangerous fellows everywhere, so I started assuming my position here starting from this year.」

「I……see.」

I guessed the [dangerous fellow] they were talking about referred to me. It seemed that Amor now harbored dislike toward me since that dungeon incident.

「If it's a daughter of Mars House then surely she will be fit to serve as the princess's knight.」

「Yes uncle.」

Expression vanished from Elena's face for a moment, but in the next moment she put on a gentle smile and nodded quietly.

「Though……that's only if that person, is better than the person, who I chose.」

「Very good. However, for the sake of fairness, both of them shall use wooden swords with the same length. Do you agree?」

Amor said that in respond to Elena's reply and he grinned.

I used short sword as my weapon. Even though the weapon was the same, the skill to use it was separated into <Sword Skill> and <Short Sword Skill> because the weapon's center of gravity and the way to use it could be different.

If it was a weapon with similar way to use, I could use that weapon with the proficiency of level 1 even without actually having the skill. From what I “saw”, Sandra had the capability of <Sword Skill Level 2>. That was why Amor tried to remove me using this head on scheme.

「The two of you shall fight and the winner will become Elena’s aide. Lady Sandra and you over there have no objection right?」

「Yes, thank you very much, your highness!」

Sandra was smiling widely as though she had won already. She tossed a wooden sword toward me with a smug expression.

「Here I come!」

Sandra raised her wooden sword and charged forward the moment I caught the wooden sword.

I still hadn’t even taken a stance. The instructor tried to call for a stop seeing that but Amor stopped him with his gaze.

It seemed the wooden sword that was given to me hadn’t been tampered at all. But, Sandra’s stance when she raised her wooden sword looked slightly sloppy. There must be something like iron or something that was inserted into it.

That sword would be no different from an actual iron rod if it was swung properly. With such weapon, it was suspect whether I would be able to block it or not if there was difference between our skill level. But you know……

Kan-!

「——Gya!?」

The girl looked like she was approaching slowly within my thought that was accelerated with body strengthening. I dodged the tip of her sword and struck her wrist. Then I struck away the heavy wooden sword.

Having skill or not was pointless when she was that *slow*.

Not even a single second had passed since the fight started. She was as fast as the average knight thanks to her Sword Skill, but the gap between our physical speed, thinking speed, and also real battle experience was too vast.

Sandra crouched down while holding her wrist. I tossed my wooden sword in front of her and walked back toward Elena. She was smiling joyfully while welcoming me back. She then directed that smile toward Amor.

「Uncle……it's regrettable but, this doesn't even worth any consideration.」

「……That seems to be the case.」

Amor's expression looked like she had chewed on something bitter when he heard those words. He glared at Sandra and me before turning around and leaving immediately.

「……That girl, have I met her somewhere before?」

There was a girl watching what happened in the training ground from behind the school building.

The girl wasn't looking at the princess. She also wasn't here to observe the training. She simply arrived to this place by accident while following a certain person.

She had no interest at the training or the odd match. But, the person in the middle of that……she felt like she had seen that pinkish blonde hair from somewhere before.

「I wonder where it was……」

It was before she came to the capital……. It was before she got adopted……. It was at that orphanage……

「Hmm~, well, it doesn't matter.」

Her memory when she was living in that orphanage at the north was already fading. The vast amount of “knowledge” and “emotion” that flowed into her from the [magic stone] she obtained had blotted out her painful memories and thinned them down.

She didn’t even remember the face of her parent who worked a night job or her name anymore.

But that was a good thing. After all she was going to become this world’s “heroine”.

「Umm……can you spare me a little bit of your time?」

The girl caught up to the person she followed and called out to him.

「……What, do you want?」

Amor turned around with a slight irritation. The girl put on a cheerful smile and sent him an upward gaze……she stared at Amor with an alluring gaze.

「You, looked like in a great pain, that I unconsciously spoke up. Did something painful just happen to you? ……I’m sorry. Am I, being a bother?」

「……N-no」

The girl who looked alluring despite her childish look seemed to be worrying for him. It shook Amol. The girl smiled softly as though she was relieved……then she gently touched him with her fingertips, as though to seep into his frayed heart.

「My name is “Licia”. If you don’t mind……will you, talk with me for a bit?」

A topic about a certain girl was becoming widespread inside the sorcery academy.

The first princess's close attendant. The lone aide who was accompanying the princess to everywhere in the academy.

Princess Elena's beauty was known throughout inside and outside the country. But that girl's beautiful face wasn't at all inferior even when standing side by side with such personage.

That close attendant didn't simply have a good look. She also struck down a female student from a noted martial family who aimed to become a knight in an instant during the practical class. It made everybody become unable to look down on her as a mere low ranked noble.

The winter had also ended. It was early afternoon with very clear weather and light breeze caressing the skin…….

The sorcery academy was said to be as big as a single district of the capital. It contained school buildings, training grounds, and dormitories for students to live in. Other than those, it also had a shopping district where the capital's famous shops that had passed through the black ops' strict investigation were lined up. The shops there weren't charged to pay rent, so the products that were lined up there were sold with far cheaper price than even at the capital. The area was bustling with many students everyday.

At the terrace of one of those shops that was offering tea and snacks……at one of the outdoor seat, the aforementioned girl was having a light meal while reading a book the size of a small pocket book.

The passing students had their eyes caught by the "pink blond hair" that was fluttering from the breeze. They stopped walking as though something was pulling at them.

The uniform with long skirt that reached until the girl's ankle was something worn by the "close attendant" serving the children of high ranked nobles. It really suited the girl who possessed a mature atmosphere even though she still wasn't of age.

The age of the students who enrolled into the academy was in the range of twelve to fifteen years old——it was the age where they entered puberty

and started to strongly get conscious with the opposite sex. At the same time it was also the age when female student idolized their fellow woman who was more mature than the rest.

Even so not a single person tried to approach the girl. Rather than being caused by feeling timid to approach a flower on high peak, perhaps it was because the girl who felt more like a solitude flower was enveloped in an atmosphere that couldn't be dirtied by anyone.

A single girl was approaching that girl.

Anyone who was aware of the circumstance would realize that was the female knight hopeful who got defeated by that girl.

What could be her reason for approaching the pink haired girl who was constantly at the princess's side when she was alone? But the knight girl didn't have any dangerous atmosphere and handed something that looked like a letter to the pink haired girl. The middle ranked noble girl bowed her head several times to the low ranked noble girl before leaving that place.

.

「Sandra……did you manage to carry out your task well this time?」

「Y-yes. Rudolph-sama……」

The place changed. It was inside a school building that currently wasn't in use because of the change in curriculum. There Sandra was facing a son of a high ranked noble.

Even high ranked noble couldn't use a school building that was owned by the country as the pleased, but the two were sitting on sofa and there was even freshly prepared tea placed in front of them.

Even that tea wasn't prepared by the two students. Normally even high ranked noble could only bring two servants to accompany them, but Rudolph was bringing nearly ten servants with him in order to show off his authority.

Furthermore they were normal servants. They were glaring at Sara with a dangerous look on their faces. It made Sandra felt the awkwardness like when a badly behaved older friend of her dragged her to the city at night in the past.

「We won't have to do something troublesome like this if only you were able to become her highness's aide though.」

「My deepest apologies-」

Sandra hurriedly bowed her head when Rudolph spoke those words with sarcasm in his tone.

Rudolph's Heydale House and Sandra's Mars House were in a relationship of caregiver and dependant.

Rudolph was a student in the knight department. Even there he had the strength to reach rank 2. If he made use of his family's connection then he should also be able to aim to become the commander of the royal guard which was filled with elites. But Rudolph didn't feel satisfied by that and wanted to obtain a connection with the royal family because of his sense of self-importance.

There was also the circumstance of how the economy of Count Heydale's territory was currently declining. Rudolph was scheming to make the sickly princess who wouldn't be married off to other country to marry into his house so that the evaluation of Heydale House would improve, and with that he would revitalize the economy of his territory and satisfied his pride.

「……I'm not going to let those two to throw around their weight anymore than this.」

Everything behind his decision was caused by his "jealousy" toward his fellow high ranked nobles.

Rudolph was in the same year with Rockwell and Mihail. They were the heir of Dandall House and Rockwell House that were royalties in the past. In the future they would be assigned with important posts of supreme

knight commander and prime minister, so it had been decided from the start that they would become the aides of the crown prince Ervan.

Rudolph thought that he was unable to rank first in the knight department because of Rockwell making use of his house's influence. Those two also caused him to have no chance to get close to the crown prince so he was harboring grudge toward them.

His scheme to make Princess Elena to marry into his family and left the royal family was also his revenge toward the royal family that didn't choose him.

He moved to put the daughter of his family's dependant to become Elena's aide as the foundation of his scheme, but the result was that his plan was foiled handily by an "adopted girl" of low ranked noble house that he thought only had good look going for her.

「Rudolph-sama, that woman accepted my apology and agreed to have a private talk with me without anyone else present. When class is over today……」

「She will come here ignorantly? Oi, is the preparation finished?」

Rudolph arrogantly reclined back while calling out to behind him. The man behind him was being told about something from his subordinate before he turned around with an awkward expression.

「Young master. About that, is it possible to postpone the plan for a little bit?」

「What did you say? Gordon, what are you saying?」

Rudolph glared at the man called Gordon, but the man shrugged nonchalantly. He was dressed in butler uniform as though he was a servant of Rudolph, but the man simply didn't look respectable no matter how one looked at him.

That pink haired girl, she's just too skilled for a student……I think. I'm investigating her but, the information broker in the capital still hasn't sent me any report. That woman, isn't it possible that she's from black ops or something?

Hmph, what, Gordon. Is the *thief guild* scared of a new female student like that?

Gordon sighed, not because of Rudolph's provocative words, but for his rashness in exposing their true identity so lightly. Gordon wasn't alone here. Most of the aides that Rudolph brought with him weren't even student. They were members of thief guild that were dispatched here.

In the past the territory of Count Heydale was a place that had great money circulation and also good public order, but the branch of assassin guild that they were working together with got destroyed, so the lawless people who didn't dare to approach until then because they feared the assassin guild flooded in to fill the empty slot. It made the public order of the territory became worse in the blink of eye.

Count Heydale considered that a serious matter and contacted the "thief guild" looking for bribe and the maintenance of the public order. With their help the public order was restored on the surface.

Other than that the thief guild also started a new "business" and a part of the profit from there was given to the count. With that the thief guild also became involved with even the territory's government. The territory became overflowing with money, but the number of thugs in the city started to increase and at present the territory of Count Heydale felt like it had a degenerate atmosphere hanging over it faintly.

I sent my subordinate to check that woman's combat strength, so please wait until that guy at least come back. At worst I can also Appraise her when she come here but, I hope you can hold back from doing anything until then.

Gordon gave a passively negative opinion. It worsened Rudolph's mood.

「Even if she's a bit skilled, you can just push her down with everyone here and use the "magic drug" on her. You already prepared it right?」

「……Well, yeah I have.」

Rudolph and his men, the members of thief guild were going as far as accompanying Rudolph to the academy was for the sake of the "business" that they were running in Count Heydale's territory——selling an addictive drug called [magic drug]. They were trying to expand the drug's traffic route.

"Magic drug" could gave its consumer the feeling of intoxication and happiness with a cheap price. This drug was starting to spread mainly among the youths who couldn't enter into bar. It wouldn't be a problem if the drug was consumed in small dose, but consuming it in large amount would cause the user to become strongly addicted. Because of that the youths who had bright future ahead of them became agreeable to do illegal work that the thief guild prepared for them in order to obtain the drug. That was becoming the money source for the thief guild.

「Drown that woman in magic drug. I'll make her into my "woman" then.」

Rudolph laughed with a vulgar smile. Gordon let out a small sigh. Sandra too was someone who was currently getting addicted to the drug. She felt scared about the change to herself, even so she couldn't help but greedily stare at the magic drug that Gordon took out from his pocket.

.

「So the one controlling the sale of "magic drug" is really the thief guild.」

Everyone simultaneously lifted up their face when a woman's voice suddenly spoke up.

「Who!?」

「Where is she-!」

The thieves looked around but then a breeze flowed and they turned around. There, that pink haired girl appeared from the darkness of the door that had been opened without any of them realizing it.

「You……」

The moment he saw her figure, the expression of Gordon who was a resident of the underworld changed as though he was guessing something. But Rudolph was upset because someone witnessed his illegal dealing and immediately acted to silence the witness.

「Capture her! Drug her until she can't think anymore!」

He didn't order for her to be killed because he thought that he would be able to control her as he pleased after she got drugged to the gill. Rudolph still hadn't given up on his revenge and greed.

That was why he made such fatal mistake with his order.

「Wait, you guys-!!」

Some people reflexively moved into action from Rudolph's order. Gordon reflexively raised his voice when he saw that.

「——Gah!?」

But that warning came a bit late. The girl who was wearing a uniform that reached until her ankle stepped forward as though she was gliding on the floor. Her hands thrust forward and pierced the neck of two men who were jumping her.

Before the men could crumple, she tossed them to the left and right while moving forward glidingly. She then grabbed the jaw of a nearby woman who couldn't react and twisted her neck right to the side till it snapped.

「……W-what!?」

「T-this bitch!」

Several men and women pulled out their bladed weapons and leaped at the woman. Their mind was in panic and couldn't catch up with the situation, but they simply knew that they were under attack.

「Stop, stop-!!」

Gordon yelled to stop that, but his voice didn't reach the panicked people. One man had his throat pierced by the girl's fingertips, another man got his crotch crushed with a kick, then the girl stepped forward and her palm heel crushed the ribs of the woman behind him.

「Hih――」

A man was struck with terror seeing that, even so he rushed forward. The girl's knee struck his face, then without pause her arm snaked around his neck from above and snapped it.

「……What is, this guy……」

That gruesome beauty of a murderer with her white fingertips soaked in blood made Rudolph stood stock still while groaning out his words. But Gordon's thick arm suddenly went around Rudolph's neck from behind and he pointed his short sword on Rudolph's neck.

「D-don't come over here! I'll kill this brat if you do!」

「Y-you, what are――」

「Shaddup!! I'm not gonna die just from going along with your play house! Shit, why the hell is this monster in an academy for the brats!」

「Gordon!?」

「This brat is still the heir of a high ranked noble no matter how stupid he is, it'll be troublesome if he die right!? Get back!」

Gordon was screaming in fear as though he was pleading.

If the heir of a high ranked noble from noble faction got killed inside the academy, even if he was from a declining house, it could become an excuse for the noble faction to ask the royal family to take responsibility and increased their momentum.

「You too Sandra!! Is that sword on your waist just a decoration! Kill herrrrr!」

Gordon's mind was also incoherent. He told the girl to [back off] yelling at Sandra to [kill her].

Sandra's mind was also in chaos. Being yelled like that and with the grudge that she nursed toward the girl, it pushed her to unsheathe her sword which was a live sword this time and she rushed her.

「Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!」

Gan!

In that instant, Sandra heard the sound of her own chin getting smashed by the girl's palm heel. She realized that the girl was already holding back even at that mock battle while falling down.

Sandra's movement caused the girl's figure to be blocked from Gordon's sight for an instant. The moment Sandra's back crumpled down——the girl's figure vanished and Rudolph was kicked away from the side. Gordon's thick arm was broken like a withered branch.

It all happened in just an instant.

But, Gordon couldn't even scream or spew out his resentment.

The pinkish blond hair of the girl who was standing with composure looked "ashen" from the building's dust in the air that was reflecting the light. It reminded Gordon of that existence.

The existence that annihilated an assassin guild's branch, then crushed a militaristic branch of the thief guild. Anyone who knew about the

underworld absolutely wouldn't dare to make enemy of either of these two guilds, but this existence did just that with the two guilds simultaneously and slaughtered everyone who was sent to take revenge on her.

If someone tried something with her, everyone would be slaughtered and their branch crushed together with them.

An existence that they mustn't laid their hand on――

「……"Ash Crowned Princess"……」

Gordon muttered those words as though the end of the world had arrived. Hearing that, Rudolph who had heard from his father of the nickname of the culprit who annihilated an assassin guild couldn't stand anymore and leaned on the wall where he got kicked at while falling on his butt.

「H-help……」

「I won't kill you. But, don't misunderstand.」

Rudolph looked like he had found hope for an instant, but the girl sent an expressionless glance at him before her jade colored eyes looked down on the fallen people icily.

「I'm arresting all of you as collaborators of the thief guild. Don't think that you can cover up your act of bringing in thieves inside the academy and endangering the princess like it never happened.」

Rudolph looked up at the girl. Her figure was simply too terrifying……and beautiful.

▼ Aria (Alicia)　Race : Human♀ –　Rank 4

「Magic Power : 265/300」△ 30 UP「Stamina : 234/250」△ 40 UP

「Strength : 10 (14)」△ 1 UP「Endurance : 10 (14)」△ 1 UP「Agility : 15 (22)」△ 1 UP「Dexterity : 8」

□Short Sword Skill Level 4□△ 1 UP□Martial Art Level 4□△ 1 UP
□Throwing Level 4□△ 1 UP□Archery Level 2□△ 1 UP

□Defense Level 4□□String Control Level 4□

□Light Magic Level 3□□Darkness Magic Level 4□□Non-Elemental Magic Level 4□

□Daily Life Magic×□□□Magic Power Control Level 4□□Pressure Level 4□

□Stealth Level 4□□Night Vision Level 2□□Search Level 4□□Poison Resistance Level 3□□Abnormal Status Resistance Level 1□NEW

□Simple Appraisal□

□Overall Combat Strength : 1152 (With Body Strengthening : 1440)□△ 236 UP

Academy’s Day Off

In this academy, there was another “Rainbow Sword” than me attached to the job.

I approached the destination, an alchemical incinerator that didn’t produce any smoke. Beside it was a middle aged man wearing janitor working clothes, crouching on the ground while smoking on a pipe. She was calling out to a pretty maid in her twenty who came there to throw the trash, but the man didn’t look dejected at all despite the maid treating his advance coldly.

「……Viro.」

「Aria……did you, see?」

「Of course.」

I wonder why this kind of role really suited this man? He looked truly natural looking like this…….

「This isn’t like how it looks like okay? After all I’m disguising myself as a janitor who you can see anywhere, that’s all you know? Don’t get any misunderstanding alright? Also don’t mention anything about this to Sera or Chloe-san okay?」

「I don’t care about any of that, but for now, the “decoy investigation” is finished.」

From the start the drug called “magic drug” inside the academy was becoming a problem among the low ranked nobles. The black ops investigated it and found out where the drug generally originated from, but the culprit was a high ranked noble which made it complicated for them to

lay their hand on him. There I used the chance to forcefully crush them to make it into Elena's achievement.

Sandra's name also came up as someone involved, so I made use of her when she showed up before me in class.

「By the way, about that royal brother, is he involved with this business?」

Until now Amor's name never came up during the talk about the magic drug business. In the first place I couldn't even judge whether he was really an instructor here or not, but as expected Viro seemed to know about him when I asked that question.

「He showed up in front of you as expected huh. His presence here is unexpected but, that royal brother is uninvolved.」

「……Well, I guessed that's the case.」

That was the only logical answer from how haphazardly he was acting.

「But, apparently there was really a plan for him to become an instructor in this academy from long time ago. It's really just a coincidence that he showed up in this magic drug case. And about him becoming instructor this year……well, it's your fault I guess?」

「……」

It felt like Amol became somewhat ill after seeing Carla and my "power".

He was showing an abnormal desire to protect Elena so I don't think that he would get in her way, but it was possible that he would get in Elena's way by trying to get rid of me.

「Also, I learned more about what's going on behind the scene from what Melrose's young master told you. This year's outdoor field trip apparently will be observing the exercises of the second knight order. From what I heard the second knight order will be in charge of the security in the place of the black ops. You just focus on guaranteeing the safety of the royalties.」

I asked Viro to investigate the information that I heard from Mihail at the opening ceremony.

Apparently Ervan was still refusing to be guarded by the black ops like usual.

He was a human so I guessed it couldn't be helped if he was ruled by his emotion, but when I looked at Ervan and Amor, it looked like even Elena when she was seven years old were still more prudent than them as a royalty.

「Safety of the royalties? Is that including the fiancée Carla?」

At the dungeon, the fiancées of the crown prince were given treatment that was nearly like a royalty and also the duty that came with it. But, putting aside Clara, was there any need to guard Carla?

Viro understood what I wanted to say. He frowned seeing that he himself almost got killed once by her.

「I don't mean that scary little lady. Even if this is supposed to be a field trip for kids, accident that can't be managed by the teachers who are just middle ranked nobles at best might just occur, right? That's why the crown prince is coming along as the supervisor of the whole thing. There was also talk about his highness Amor coming along, but that person is in a troublesome position after all……」

I was wondering why the opinion of the second year crown prince about the field trip for the new students would be listened at, but apparently he was also going to participate in it huh.

It was the crown prince who would oversee the whole thing instead of the royal brother must be because they also wanted to make the crown prince work. Even so Ervan was basically a good hearted person, so to me he was still better than Amor.

「It's the princess's wish that you're chosen as guard. That royal brother's opinion can't be ignored but, there won't be any problem with that because

the princess's authority as royalty is above that guy.

It'll be good if that's the case……

It might be bad to say this but, the current royal brother is different from the previous royal brother who died early. He only received education to be the king's retainer, so don't compare him to the princess who received education for gifted children.

……I'll keep it in mind.

That explanation from Viro made me realized that perhaps I had been looking at Amor like that until now. I nodded deeply to him.

This too must be a lesson as a "scout" from him to me. In that case……I tried asking him about something else that bothered me.

Hey Viro.

What?

I can't really hold back properly against student.

You……

For some reason he was looking at me in exasperation.

Go back to Sera's mansion in your next day off and ask your "little bro" for a spar. I'll explain to Sera about it.

I see.

Certainly if it was Seo then he might be just right to be my sparring partner. The thing that I ordered might also get finished soon, so I decided to ask for a day off and head to the capital at that day.

.

「My lady, welcome back.」

「I am back.」

The day the academy was in holiday, I showed up in the mansion of Leyton House that was located in the capital with Elena's permission. I was welcomed by the maids who were acquaintance with me.

Being taken care by maids like this as a "young lady" was also a part of training for me to act as a noble lady. I considered this as a part of the job.

And so I stayed inside my room in this mansion and drank tea with a posture that looked elegant…….

Bam!

「Aria!!」

A brown skinned boy rushed into the room after slamming open the door. I stopped his movement by grabbing his face in my hand.

「It has been some time since we last met, Seo. Around the time of the opening ceremony I guess. Are you alright with taking a day off?」

「Aria-, it'll split! My head, it's going to split-!」

It seemed I was unable to adjust my strength because he rushed in so quickly. I remembered that and let go of his head. Seo looked somewhat tearful, even so he spread out his arms happily with a face that got my hand print on it.

「I wanted to meet you all this time, Aria!」

.

▼ Seo Leyton Race : Human♂ – Rank 3

「Magic Power : 125/130」「Stamina : 141/180」

【Overall Combat Strength : 299 (With Body Strengthening : 355)】

.

I was concerned with the gap of Seo and my combat strength, but if he was rank 3 then he should be strong enough.

He was assigned with the job of guarding that strange young lady, so it had been a long time since we could talk like this but, it felt like he had gotten slightly taller than before.

Seo's age was one year younger than me, but his appearance right now had grown up from mana just like me. He had the appearance of a 14 years old.

【……I know it, you're taller than me.】

【I don't think it's really a concern though?】

【I'm concerned! Even though it's already problematic that Aria is the "big sister".】

【Even though I'm the older sister, Seo is still the heir right?】

What was he worried about? I was an "adopted daughter" just for the duration of this job, so I think there wouldn't be any problem……I was thinking like that while tilting my head. It made Seo strangely started to panic.

【T-that's not what I mean, I'm not worried about being the heir or not! Ah, but, it might also be nice if Aria is the heir and I'm your assistant.】

It felt like Seo now often fell into deep thought suddenly since our reunion.

【More importantly, I want to spar with you……】

【Ah, I heard about that. What now? Are we going to do it at the courtyard? I won't be able to stay too long but, I'll be able to keep you company for at least half a day you know?】

The house of Baronet Layton was a lineage of black ops. Sera was also in charge of supervising the palace's security, so this house had the financial strength that surpassed the average middle ranked noble despite being a low ranked noble house. Naturally this mansion in the capital and their villa all had a lot of servants and wide garden. It was also possible to train there but…….

「Today I'll also go pick up an something that I ordered, so I'm thinking of going out to the capital and borrowing the training ground of the adventurer guild while there. I also called Feld to come so I can ask him to train Seo too.」

「Eh!?」

Seo looked really surprised. Was there something that he felt concerned about?

「Aria……you'll be with that man again……」

He started muttering something like that with small voice. Perhaps Seo too was curious about Feld. After that Seo still wouldn't come back to his senses even after some time passed, so it couldn't be helped. I grabbed his collar and dragged him toward the adventurer guild.

.

「So, how are things going with that lady?」

After that Seo returned to his senses. We walked through the capital while I tried asking him the question that was in my mind.

「T-that's, just because I'm together with other girl……」

「That young lady, didn't look normal.」

Seo looked dejected for some reason when I replied to him. That young lady was at the level of ordinary person combat strength-wise, but I got some kind of bad premonition from her. I hoped that she wouldn't be a

problem but, there was a possibility that thing would turn troublesome if Seo was unable to get a handle on her.

「……To be honest, she's a bit handful. It feels like her sense of distance is too close should I say, she's too touchy-feely, and sometimes I don't get what she's saying.」

「What is Sera saying about her?」

「Kaa-san said that she's a young lady in a complicated position, so I should protect her with my all regardless of my feeling.」

「……」

Regardless of his feeling……huh. That was an evaluation that was unlike the neutral Sera. It made me increased my wariness level toward that girl by one step. Just who in the world that girl was that the black ops went as far as assigning Sera's son to be her guard…….

Even so……there was that lady in addition to Amor. There were many people around me with complicated position huh.

.

The season still wasn't spring but, Claydale Kingdom was located at the south of the continent. Here it wasn't so cold that it could snow. Even I was just wearing a thin coat over my uniform. We arrive at that shop and I pushed open the door lightly.

「Gelf, you there?」

I called out to the back of the empty shop. From there, a *male* dwarf in his prime appeared wearing a red mermaid dress and high heels that made a sound that was like horseshoes when stepping on the floor.

「My~, isn't this Aria-chan. You're also bring a cute boy with you today! Have you gotten used to noble lady life I wonder?」

「No problem. Is my order finished?」

「……You're a kid with weak reaction like usual. I've finished your order you know. The design is based on the recent newest product from Dandall that I arranged with my own style. I'll teach you the way to wear it too so come inside. You boy, do you also want to change clothes?」

At the end he turned toward Seo and winked his eye that had long eyelashes. In respond Seo shook his head really fast.

Gelf was a rock dwarf who was skilled with blacksmithing, but here he was making pretty equipments that he wanted to wear himself. He was an odd person but a first class craftsman. Though for some reason Dalton absolutely wouldn't visit this place despite recognizing Gelf's skill.

I made an order to Gelf to use the materials that I obtained from dungeon to strengthen my protective equipments, and to make a thin protector that I could wear under my uniform.

To be more specific, I wanted a bustier like the one Sera was wearing in the dungeon, the one made from fiber mythril.

At the academy the outfit I was wearing wasn't the black leather dress that I was wearing before, but the academy uniform or the palace maid uniform just like Sera.

Because of that I was uneasy with my defense, so I made a request to Gelf in order to take care of that completely.

「Clean it by soaking it or using Clean okay? It will regenerate from mana to a certain degree but, the silk part won't be included in that so be careful.」

「Roger.」

「And take this too. I made a spare for you.」

The thing that Gelf handed to me was thin tights that were also made from mythril fiber.

They were so thin that they looked transparent and they clung tightly on the skin. ……This thing felt similar with the so called [stocking] like in that woman's knowledge. It seemed that they were attached to something called garter belt that also existed in the knowledge. But……

「Is the money enough? This must be really expensive.」

Turning mythril into fiber required special technique. There weren't even five people in the kingdom that could make it. One of them was Gelf. The bustier too wasn't completely made from mythril and it seemed that silk string was also weaved in but, just one of it would require mythril that was worth several large golden coins.

「I had received the money from that from Nii-san too. You left behind a lot of money at Nii-san's place right? He sent the money together with Aria-chan's weapon, telling me to use half of it for your equipments here.」

As I thought he wouldn't accept all the money again this time…….

From that dungeon exploration, Rainbow Sword got paid with a lot of money by the royal family, but Dalton gave the Minotaurus Murder's horn that I broke to me especially.

It was a material from a rank 6 monster. The other parts got burned by Carla so originally the horn should be given to the royal family but, Elena talked to his majesty the king so that it got gifted to me individually.

High ranked monster and mythical beast accumulated the minerals that they consumed into their horn or fang, turning them into special metal. When those materials were refined, their hardness wouldn't be any different from myhtril or magic iron, but it was said that their mana transmission rate and regenerative ability were superior compared to other rare metals.

I opened the leather wrap that Gelf handed to me. Inside there were the black knife and dagger that I entrusted to Galbas. I quietly picked them up

and pulled the out from the sheath. The two pitch black blades were faintly radiating red shine.

「……Amazing.」

「Yes. Those are weapons that have been strengthened with “Adamantite”.」

The rare metal [Adamantite (Living Metal)] that was said to be harvestable from only high rank monster in extremely small amount each──.

Craftsman who could process adamantite was only dwarf. But, when I showed Minotaurus Murder’s horn to Galbas, it seemed that the amount of adamantite contained inside that one horn wouldn’t be enough to create a new weapon. He suggested to me to use the adamantite to strengthen my black knife and black dagger.

I didn’t know how and which part of them got strengthened, but their “quality” was clearly different from before when they were just made from magic steel. I could feel it just from holding them in my hands. With this I should be able to cut apart even an ogre’s hide or chainmail.

「Thank you……I’ll be able to fight properly with this.」

「Yep, looking good. I believe that the current Aria-chan will be able to use them well. Also, this is my present to you to celebrate your enrollment.」

「Hm?」

At the very end Gelf handed to me something that was wrapped with paper.

「Woman is all about guts! Wear that when it’s the time for “battle”!」

「……」

What kind of “battle” he was talking about? The inside of the wrapping for some reason was the thing that recently got popular from Dandall. Very short drawers made from pure white silk with strings at both sides to fix them in place, ten of them.

.

「L-let's go quickly Aria!」

At the beginning Seo was reluctant to go to the adventurer guild, but as expected it must be awkward for him to be in a shop for female. He was hurrying up and dragging me out of Gelf's shop as though he was scared of something.

Seo walking while grabbing my hand was gathering gazes from the surrounding.

It must also be the influence of our outfit. I was wearing my academy uniform in order to adjust it with my new equipments. My hair also wasn't covered with ash. Seo was wearing the butler uniform that signified his status as a noble's servant. Both of us had grown up from mana to look like youths who were about to reach maturity, so it couldn't be helped that we stood out.

It was the same at the adventurer guild. It seemed that only adventurer with some degree of strength gathered in the capital's guild. And the number of people who knew me had become many after several years had passed. Even so people left and came in the capital everyday in great number. There were also a lot of "self-proclaimed strong adventurer" who came here from the countryside.

「Oi oi, since when the adventurer guild became a place for little lady bringing her butler for rendezvous huuh?」

A man in his thirty with his hair shaved up spoke with intentional loudness so others could hear him.

Even though this was the capital, the adventurer guild was a place where ruffians gathered. Someone from the countryside who was proud of their skill picking a fight with young adventurer was a common sight. Academy student who was only around rank 1 coming to the guild to take odd job request for spare change also wasn't rare.

But a familiar receptionist lady raised her face when she heard that voice. Her expression instantly changed when she saw me and she immediately rushed out from behind the counter in panic. Meanwhile the man was approaching us while squaring off his shoulders.

「Looking closer you're quite a pretty lady ain't you. Then you should come with──」

Gukin

「Ariaaaaa!?」

Seo screamed with a convulsing expression when he saw me grabbing that man's jaw and twisting it to the side.

「Someone! Call a healer here!」

The receptionist lady who rushed to this way was also screaming out an order. The adventurers inside the guild were sporting a look that was half exasperated and half scared while seeing that man crumbling down. Then they started moving like it was a familiar routine.

「It's fine. I only twisted his neck halfway.」

「There was a loud cracking sound though!?」

Sometimes joint could make loud sound when the owner only trained their muscles without considering flexibility. The guild's staffs and guards carried away the man in a hurry, then the receptionist lady from before called out to me from behind.

「Aria-san……it's troubling if you don't hold back.」

「Sorry, Mary……」

I was planning to have a spar in order to learn that "holding back" though…….

She was the receptionist lady from the adventurer guild at the territory of Baron Horace who had helped me a lot in that fight against the orc group.

I didn't really understand the reason but, apparently mary moved to the capital's guild using Viro's connection. Since she arrived here, she became the staff in charge of me who didn't have any exclusive staff before that. I heard that she also became the one in charge of dealing with Viro.

「Well, both sides in this case are adventurer so I won't say much. Anyway Feld-sama is already waiting at the training ground in the back. I have properly reserved that place for you.」

「Right, thanks.」

Troublesome thing like this time sometimes would also happen to a girl like me, so Mary too was used to it.

It seemed that Seo got nervous with facing a pretty lady. Mary only smiled to him and gave a small bow.

.

「Yo, Aria. Did you cause another trouble?」

When I arrived at that training ground, Feld was already there swinging his great sword. He called out to me with a light mood.

「It wasn't really a problem……I think?」

「No, that was definitely a problem.」

Seo immediately retorted when I said that while titling my head. Feld squinted his eyes smilingly seeing us like that.

「And, what do you want to do? Are you going to train with [Iron Rose]?」

Sometimes I would ask Feld to have a spar with me so I could inspect how my Battle Skill [Iron Rose] would influence me in various situations, like when in combat or using sorcery.

It was a technique that increased my combat strength so drastically, so my sparring partner when inspecting it had to be rank 5 too. If not the

efficiency would be bad. I did want to do some more inspection, but this time I had also asked Seo to accompany me, and he also couldn't leave his protection target for that long, so it would be better if I prioritized my original business.

「Then, first is──」

「Feld-sama! I ask you to have a match with me!」

Seo suddenly requested a match with Feld before I could say anything.

I called you two here so I could train though…….

.

「……」

In the end Feld and Seo started sparring while leaving me alone.

Gan! Gin!

「What's wrong boy, is that all you got!」

「Not yettt!」

Seo too was hanging in there but, he had become rank 3 only recently. Feld whose technique had gotten even sharper from exploring that dungeon was still far above him.

Seo's fighting style was "hand-to-hand". I could also fight hand-to-hand with my <Martial Art> Skill, but in my case my main method of fighting in the end was using Short Sword Skill to dodge and block.

But Seo was using level 3 <Hand-to-Hand> Skill and <Martial Art> Skill to fight in a very novel way that was also influenced by his own personality. But, the biggest difference was how fast he was able to use the Battle Skill of <Hand-to-Hand> I guess.

Feld……looked like he was having fun. He liked children and was good with taking care of other, so he must be having fun training someone like Seo.

This wouldn't help with my training to "hold back" but, by watching Feld's way of fighting, it was vague but it could serve as reference for me. It couldn't be helped so I also watched them as observer, then I suddenly sensed a familiar presence approaching the entrance.

「Mary, what's the matter?」

「Just now, information that Viro requested arrived, so can I ask you to hand it over to him at the academy?」

「That's fine but, is it alright for me to take a look at it too?」

After only half a hour since we parted, she came here bringing something like a letter and handed it to me. If it was information that Viro personally requested then it would be better for the guild to hand it over to him directly, but Mary chuckled when I said that.

「This is information that "Rainbow Sword" requested, and Aria-san is a scout like Viro so I think he won't mind. Besides he also told me to hand it over to Aria-san.」

「I see.」

Viro was starting to consider retiring from adventurer business so I was also starting to take over for him. I still hadn't managed to grasp all the connections and information sources that he had but, if that was what Mary said, I accepted the letter and took a look at it.

「……」

「Is something the matter?」

「No.」

I see……it was an information that “I” should know about.

.

「Uwah, it’s this time already!? Sorry Aria! I’ll meet you again later!」

After that one more hour passed. Seo panicked and returned to his job in a hurry. The training for today was closed with that.

「That guy will become strong. If only he can also become an adventurer. It’s a pity.」

Feld who managed to get some exercises after a long time also looked satisfied. But, his expression suddenly changed when I walked toward him.

「Aria……did something happen?」

「No, it’s nothing.」

「Oi」

I circled behind Feld to dodge the question and climbed up to put my upper body on his shoulder. Feld’s legs slightly stopped walking.

「Aria……stop acting like kid.」

「No?」

When I asked back like that, Feld let out a small sigh while adjusting his posture to make it easier to carry me.

「……Come to think of it, you’re still a “kid” huh.」

Since asking Feld to lift her up in that dungeon, I took a liking to that wide field of vision and so it became a habit of mine to sometimes get on Feld’s shoulder like this, though even I thought that this was a childish thing to do.

It didn’t mean that I would do this with anyone who was tall but, right now I didn’t feel like I would be able to put on my normal expression so it was

just right to do this.

The information that Viro requested included the writing about the danger that might happen in the field trip that would happen soon.

That meant that there was danger approaching Elena. The information also stated the possibility of the involvement of a certain someone.

It was the opponent who once defeated me, and the one who I failed to kill during our second fight…….

That guy once said to me. Show my true worth. If he targeted Elena for that…….

The madman Grave……. This time I'd be the one to come and hunt you down.

Twisted Event - First Part

Outdoor field trip for the new first year students, it was a custom of the sorcery academy. Based from what I only heard, this field trip or sightseeing was being held every year, so it wasn't that unusual of an event.

The information about the event still hadn't been announced to the students because children of high ranked nobles would participate in this event. There was a risk of kidnapping or attack that had to be considered, so the event organizer was hiding the event details until the last moment. That was what I was told.

It can't be helped that Onii-sama has to participate because of his standing, but I didn't expect for uncle to also come along. The matter of him becoming a teacher also only got told to me after the fact……if only I could stop him.

Elena and I were comparing information while drinking tea at the terrace of her mansion. Elena pressed her finger on her forehead as though she had a headache when she heard about Amor's case.

I don't think uncle will try anything strange out of nowhere but, you should be careful too Aria. That person is basing his decision on something stupid like "personal emotion" and he might try to remove you from my side because of that.

Is it possible to overturn the king's decree? By that person?

Depending on the method, like grasping the person's weakness, or with brute force……

Elena stopped at that point and once more looked at me who was dressed in maid uniform. She smiled wryly.

「Both ways will be pointless against you won't they?」

Elena ended the talk in that note. I poured more tea into her teacup while the butler Joseph spoke up.

「Elena-sama, there is an additional information that has just arrived. I believe that it might be about that matter.」

「What could it be, gramps.」

「The location of the field trip this time will be quite far from the capital, and so it is believed that the ladies from high ranked noble houses will decline to participate. In that case, your highness as a royalty will be put in the same group with the young ladies who don't possess their own carriage, but a young noble will also get fitted into there.」

「……Who is it?」

Elena guessed the "unsaid words" from that sentence and put on an elegant smile that also radiated dreadfulness.

「It's Nathanital-sama, the grandson of the head priest of the royal capital's holy church who is a baron of the robe. His endorser is his highness the royal brother.」

「My……」

The head priest of the holy church held baron rank. My "knowledge" couldn't tell me whether that was a high or low position, but based on Elena's expression, it shouldn't be wrong for me to consider that baron of the robe was higher positioned than a normal baron.

「If it's that person, then I remember playing with him when visiting the shrine of the holy church when I was little.」

Elena sighed while recalling the past.

「That person was so adorable that at first I thought he was a young lady from somewhere, so I put on a flower crown on his head. He cried because of that. Even so……I am aware how uncle is a pious devotee of the holy church but, I wonder what he is thinking this time?」

Elena's muttering ended up with a questioning tone but, she must have guessed the reason to some degree based on her annoyed expression.

I'm guessing that he was trying to push Elena into the church in order to isolate her from the conflict of this vulgar world, or if baron of the robe was in reality a position that was equal to count rank just like I imagined, there was also the possibility that this move was designed to direct Elena to marry out of the royal family.

Furthermore this was just Amor's arbitrary decision that ignored Elena and the king's opinion.

「Let's be on our guard for now. It's really troubling how the thinking and action of those who are moving based on their emotion are so hard to predict……」

Joseph and Chloe and I nodded at Elena's words.

The number of allies who Elena could be herself with was really small. Three were only these two who had been taking care of her since she was born, and then there was Sera who she brought as servant even into the dungeon I guess.

Perhaps she was putting a suspicious person like me on her side was also because of that. For the sake of Elena who couldn't even genuinely rely on her own parents and big brother, I swore to myself once more that I would at least protect her heart.

「……Is the preparat*ion*, fin*ish*ed?」

Inside a dark forest, a person who seemed to be a female clad in black cloth all over her body was talking with shaky common language that had extremely heavy accent. She was replied to by the voice of another female who was also similarly covered all over her body to hide her identity.

「I wish you'll trust us already……. Their plan to revolt still hasn't changed, and our force is also making preparation so don't worry.」

The two were working together in cooperation, but they weren't "comrades" by all means.

The two belonged to different organizations. Their objective was different. Even so what they had to do was the same, which was why they were working together.

「We're doing what needed to be done. Make yourself be capable to use that. With your status, it should produce even greater force compared to all the other weapons you have used until now.」

「……got it.」

The woman in black didn't say much and swung the magic iron chain. It resulted in a deep gash on a tree. Just how much strength was used to cause something like that?

The other woman who gave her that weapon and taught her how to use it took out a thin mythril chain that was for her use. Her eye that was the only part of her body that was exposed had burn scar around it. That eye was blazing with hatred.

("Ash Crowned"……I'll kill you no matter what!)

***

Like that one month passed without any particular problem. Around the time when the sign of spring started to appear faintly, it was announced that there would be a field trip to observe a knight order's exercise that was intended for middle ranked nobles and above.

The exercise would be carried out at a grass plain located in the middle of a territory under the royal family's direct control and the territory of Marquis Wankarl. It was an area that didn't belong to either territory. It was a place that was unsuited for people to live in because there wasn't anything there to block the sea breeze, but in exchange there would be nobody who complained if an exercise was held there.

The female students were free to choose whether to participate or not. As expected, someone who wanted to go to a place that had no inn and in a distance that would need three days of travel in carriage to arrive at was rare. There were only several people among all the female students who decided to participate.

Then those few female students should be grouped together……that was the suggestion that the academy made, but it was taken back because Carla announced that she would participate.

At the day of the trip, Elena and I and two other female students, and then the grandson of the head priest Nathanital were gathering in order to ride on the same carriage.

That Nathanital was shorter than even Elena. He was a boy with a face that really looked like a girl, but it seemed the person himself had a feeling of inferiority because of his short height and girly face. He was making a displeased expression that he had to head to the destination in the same carriage with the female students.

It would be great if nothing troublesome happened……I was thinking like that while bringing Elena's luggage into the carriage. It was then an unknown presence approached from behind.

「Pardon me. Am I not mistaken that you are Lady Aria?」

「Do you have a business with me?」

I greeted the man who looked like a knight with a bow as a high class maid. That young man then smiled brightly with his handsome face.

「I wish to talk with you for a bit about the security during the trip. Can I ask for a little bit of your time?」

「……I understand.」

.

That young knight was apparently the leader of the second knight order's first company that was in charge of the princess's security. But, what kind of business someone like that could have with me? The fact that I was the princess's bodyguard shouldn't be a public knowledge, but did he learn about it from somewhere?

That company leader escorted me toward young knights who seemed to be his subordinate. They would be in charge of security after this so naturally they were fully armored. The location was in a building inside the academy that seemed to be used as the knights' station.

「It will be the time for departure soon, so there should be little time though?」

「We won't take that long. The men of the second knight order are also helping out with the preparation of her highness's carriage, so I believe there won't be any problem.」

The company leader smiled wryly in apology. We were sitting while facing each other in the station's reception room.

「Let me pour you tea. I managed to get my hand on good tea leaves from Carlfan Empire. I'll brew it together with sugar and spices just like how it's prepared in its place of origin. The taste is a bit quirky, but it's delicious when you get used to it.」

「Aren't we going to talk about the security during the trip?」

I said that without showing any emotion. The young man shrugged a little in respond to my attitude.

「Her highness too shouldn't be angry just because we're taking a bit of time to enjoy tea correct? Also it's rude of me to not have introduced myself. My name is Joey. If possible, I too wish to listen to the story of the adventurer who managed to join the famous "Rainbow Sword" in such young age.」

「……Where did you hear that?」

I calmly asked him without any change in my tone and also without applying any pressure. Perhaps he sensed something from that me. The young man who introduced himself as Joey was at a loss for word for a moment.

「……It was from his highness the royal brother. His highness also told me how you are an extremely skilled scout who have also reached rank 4.」

「I see.」

That man again……it was troublesome that someone of such high status and a lot of free time was carelessly leaking out information.

After that Joey's subordinate entered with a tea that gave off a particular aroma. I sipped at the edge of the cup that was presented to me before quietly returning it on the table. Then I turned a half closed gaze toward the knight.

「And, are we going to talk already?」

「You still haven't even drank most of the tea. Or perhaps I should also prepare a light snack to go along with it?」

「Are you ordered to keep me in place like that?」

「What are you……」

Joey smiled as though my words were said jokingly, but a faint killing intent formed inside him at that moment. I could also hear a faint commotion outside the room.

I paid that no mind and lightly flicked on the cup before me.

「What is your intention with serving *sleeping drug* to the princess's bodyguard?」

Bam!

The door got opened loudly at the same time with those words. Then Joey's subordinates rushed inside.

Joey himself also unsheathed his sword and stood in front of his subordinates. He pointed its tip toward me who was standing up and smiled mockingly.

「So you have poison resistance……looks like I underestimated you too much on the account of you being a girl. We are ordered to not kill her highness's people if possible. Even though you're a rank 4, there's nothing a scout can do against knights inside a cramped place like this right? Let's have you surrender quietly.」

Scout was considered as weaker in combat power compared to warrior or sorcerer even if they had the same rank. If a warrior and a scout actually fought each other head on, it would be the warrior who won most of the time.

「Your target is the princess?」

Joey frowned slightly when I asked that question.

「We too are knights of the kingdom. We will never hurt her highness. For the sake of our objective, we wish for his highness the crown prince to withdraw his claim of the throne, and a "place for persuasion" has been prepared in order for us to ask her highness to become the new leader of our alliance. You're in the way of that. I'll have you surrender here.」

「……Noble faction huh. Whose order is this?」

The atmosphere of the knights changed from my words.

「Do it……I don’t mind even if you cut her limbs!」

Joey raised his voice. The knights moved into action.

But, I took a step forward in that instant and took out my black knife from my Storage (Shadow Storage). With that I tore his throat while he was unable to react.

「I’ll eliminate the enemy on Elena’s way.」

***

「Your highness, the preparation for our departure is finished. The scheduled time for our departure is also fast approaching. We should depart soon.」

The fifth company of the second knight order had arrived to guard the princess. It was the company leader who said that to Elena.

「It’s already that time? My attendant, the female student called Aria still hasn’t returned. Can’t we wait until she come back here?」

The exercise observation this time was intended for male students of baron house and higher that owned a territory. Aria who was an adopted daughter of a baronet house didn’t have the qualification to participate in it, but high ranked noble with rank higher than count was permitted to bring one attendant with them, so Elena naturally chose Aria for that role.

Originally a royalty like Elena should be forced to bring multiple bodyguards with her because of her position, but Elena insisted in being an example for other students, and a company of around forty knights, selected from among the elites of the second knight order came as her guard, so in the end she was allowed to bring Aria alone as her personal guard.

Originally a company should be composed of 200 members including common soldiers, but this time only around 40 knights riding on horse came because they would travel using carriage. That number should be enough to serve in the role of guard for several days.

When Elena who was sitting on a bench that was placed outside answered like that, the company leader put on a dry smile as though to remonstrate an unreasonable kid.

「Your highness……. If it pleases you, please also think of the other students who have been waiting inside the carriage. Besides if your highness is worried about the student called Aria, I will leave behind another carriage here so she can quickly catch up with us when she arrived. I believe that she will be able to quickly join your highness again at the resting place midway.」

「Is that so……」

These knights were chosen from among all the knights in the second knight order to be the princess's guards. They were elites among elites.

All squad leaders were rank 3. And this company leader Ludger was especially a rank 4 knight, one of the few in the knight order even though he was still at his early thirty. He was also the head of a baron house. Even Elena couldn't ignore his word so easily.

「Very well. Then I ask you to guard us well during this trip. I also ask you to make the arrangement so Aria will be able to join up with us within today.」

「It will be as your highness command. Please leave it to me.」

The situation was somewhat suspicious, but her quality as a royalty would also be questioned if she was acting too paranoid, Besides she couldn't obstinately order the whole group to [wait] after the other students got brought up.

Like that Elena left behind Aria who was her shield and her sword. She got into the royal family carriage that was prepared for her. Inside, there were the young ladies from a baron house and a viscount house that didn't have male child……and also the boy who was the grandson of the head priest who held the rank of baron of the robe.

「Long time no see, Nathanital. Is the head priest in good health?」

「Y-yes, your highness! My grandfather is doing well-!」

The boy was as petite and adorable as the other young ladies. He replied nervously when Elena had a small talk with him.

「Putting that aside……you don't have any attendant with you it seems.」

Baron of the robe was a position that was related to religion, so that rank wasn't accompanied with a territory. But the holder of that rank received a treatment that was equal to a house of count. If Nathanital demanded it then it would be possible for him to bring an attendant, but he refused to do that.

「Yes-, I'm a child of the church before I am a noble-, so I've been raised to be able to take care of myself!」

「……I see.」

What he said was splendid, but from his expression and tone, it could be seen how he had been dyed with the ideal of the church that despised the worldly noble. Elena controlled herself so her disappointment wouldn't show from her expression while giving up having more conversation than this with Nathanital.

The other young ladies who sensed that atmosphere also kept their mouth closed. The carriage kept running while the inside was staying silent. Elena who had nothing to do turned her gaze to outside the window and noticed that the carriage that should be running from the south of the capital to the east was actually running inside a forest.

「Where is this carriage heading to? From the sun's position, it seems to be heading to the south though?」

Elena asked that question to the carriage driver from the small window installed at the front part. The soldier who drove the carriage then called out to someone else, opened the door of the carriage while keeping it running, then Ludger got inside from his horse that was running in parallel.

「Pardon me, your highness. Can I ask you to please stay quiet?」

「You……tsu」

「We will bring your highness to a certain place from here. I will guarantee the safety of the other students as long as your highness stay obedient.」

***

「What!?」

「Commander!」

「How dare you do that to Joey!」

Joey whose throat was torn up instantly crumpled down. The other knights directed their fury toward me who was holding a bloody black knife.

「You will pay-!」

Most likely these knights weren't just his coworkers but also friends. A knight who looked like he was the same age with Joey thrust with his sword. I used minimalist movement to dodge the tip while stabbing his throat with my black knife.

「Shit-! Don't let your guard down!」

「A scout won't be able to do anything when surrounded-, don't let her get away!」

「Ou!」

Their combat strength was around 200──they could be considered as upper rank 2.

Their company leader Joey was around rank 3. That Joey and his friends didn't withdraw even after I killed some of them was partly because of anger, but mostly because they were still confident of their superiority.

When many people fought inside a cramped space like inside a room, the side wearing armor and shield would have the advantage because of the limited space for dodging. Even I would first take distance when fighting against warriors of the same rank outdoor. I would then separate them before aiming to take them down one by one.

These knights thought that they could win against me even though there was difference in our rank because they felt safe from wearing armor, and because of my appearance as a slender girl. That was my thought.

But, they were mistaken in their premise. Dodging wasn't impossible just because the place was cramped.

「Wha-!?」

Even if it looked like they were attacking at the same time, there was still difference in speed from each other. I used my knife to parry the tip of the sword that reached me first, put one hand on the head of that knight who charged at me, and jumped to dodge to the ceiling.

My posture became upside down and I landed on the quite high ceiling. Then I rotated my whole body while twisting the head of the knight that my hand was still grabbing. My skirt fluttered and I pulled out the black dagger attached on my thigh, then I stabbed my knife and dagger to the side of the heads of the knights at my right and left. Then I landed back on the floor with my skirt fluttering gently.

「I-impossible……」

「How can a scout be this strong!?」

「She's just a little girl-!」

Three remaining. Put your life on the line if you want to close the gap between ranks. Besides it's unfortunate but, although I'm a scout type adventurer, I wasn't really a "scout" deep down.

Although the knights were clad in armor, it wasn't the full plate armor that they usually wore in battlefield, but just light armor that consisted of chain mail and things like breast plate or arm protectors slapped over it.

An "assassin" could kill their target if they showed their bare skin even if it was only a little.

Before they could recover from their panic, I slid into the gap between them and stabbed my dagger to a knight's flank while tearing the neck of another knight with my knife.

I jumped over that knight and kicked on the ceiling, then using that momentum I smashed in the face of the knight behind them using the hard heel of my loafer.

「You're the last one. Where're you planning to bring her highness to?」

「Dammit-」

When I pointed my blood soaked knife at him, the knight who had my dagger planted deeply into his side glared at me while sweating waterfall and kneeling on the floor.

「Don't……look down on us-, the conviction of us knights of the noble faction who grief for this country's future will never break no matter what kind of torture──」

「Then die.」

I horizontally slashed the knight's neck while he was in the middle of talking, taking his life.

If he said he wouldn't talk even under torture then it would be a waste of time to keep talking with him. I didn't know what kind of conviction these knights from noble faction had, but if they were still knight, they should be resolved for even death penalty now that they had laid their hand on a royalty.

Even if I somehow managed to extract information from someone with such resolve, I had no time to confirm whether that information was accurate or not.

「Elena……」

I checked Joey's body just in case he had something on him before going after Elena.

.

When I returned to the gathering place, the carriage was already gone just as I thought. I searched the faint track that was left on the ground before running toward the direction where the carriage seemed to being.

I arrived at the south gate of the academy and confirmed that Elena's carriage had passed through here. I showed the guard there a badge that I was related to the royal family and asked him to deliver a message to the butler at Elena's mansion, then I immediately started following the track once more. Midway the track entered a forest and from there it split into multiple tracks. I couldn't follow it any further than this.

Joseph

Which way did they go? Have I missed the track on my way here?

I was thinking like that while sharpening my Detection until the very limit to search the surrounding. Then I suddenly noticed the "gaze" from faraway that was looking at me, one that didn't belong to human.

I turned around and focused my eyes into the darkness of the forest──

「……Nero?」

「……」

The mythical beast Coeurl showed itself from inside dark forest as though it was oozing out from the darkness. Was this a coincidence or inevitability? The Coeurl who I named Nero silently stared still at me to ascertain something.

Inside the slightly gloomy forest in the morning, we were staring at each other as though to assess the other side. I quietly pointed my black dagger toward Nero.

「I'll take you on if you get in my way. And if not then──」

Gin!

Nero's whip-like whisker flew out from the darkness in that moment and clashed against my knife. I switched posture and thrust my dagger between Nero's eyes.

「Lend me your strength, Nero.」

<──right──>

Nero gave such answer and approached until my side with nimbleness that was unimaginable from such large body. It brought its nose close to the ground where I became unable to differentiate the right track.

「……You can find the right one?」

「Gaa……」

Why can't you? It felt like it was saying that to me.

Why was Nero allying itself with me? Did it recognize me in that fight?

Nero called me 「moon」 when we parted. The spirit also called me 「the child of moon rose」. Carla said that 「I was like a moon so she reached her hand toward me」.

I wonder how was "I" reflected in the world that they were seeing……?

「Let's go, Nero.」

<──right──moon──>

.

Nero started moving and following the track while I ran at its side. We continued like that for a while before we ran into a scene of two knights in the process of pushing female students in uniform into a carriage.

「Nero」

「GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!」

Nero's roar startled the knights and they turned around. I took advantage of that opening and gave an order to the female students.

「Duck!」

The knights were at a loss for a moment from the voice of me who was their *enemy.* The two female students meanwhile were reflexively ducking.

I was using body strengthening, and using pendulum's string I jumped on a tree. The knights reflexively followed me with their eyes. Nero who didn't slow down at all slammed at them with its large body.

「Disappear」

The knights got thrown to the air. I also whirled through the air and wrapped two pendulums around their necks. Then I kicked on empty air to rotate myself while using the centrifugal force to snap the knights' necks. Then I immediately unwrapped the string and threw them into the forest around us.

「……Are you two alright?」

「Y-yes.」

These female students should be the young ladies who departed in the same carriage with us. Why were the two of them here? The young lady from viscount house was replying even while looking scared at a huge beast like Nero. Then the young lady from baron house gasped and spoke up.

「Her highness and the male student from the church are still being captured! They said that we are just in the way……」

「Where are they taking Elena-sama to?」

「Ahead from here-, they shouldn't be that far yet from here-!」

I turned my gaze toward the direction the baron daughter was pointing before facing the two once more.

「You two stay inside that carriage. Reinforcement should arrive later.」

「Yes-」

「Please save the princess-!」

I nodded to them and called out to my back without even turning around.

「We're going Nero」

「Gaaa」

.

The girls saw us off while clasping their hands together in prayer. We broke into a run once more in order to hurry ahead.

Midway I climbed a tree and jumped from branch to branch while surveying my surrounding to make sure that I wouldn't miss anything. Then midway I saw an open clearing inside the forest with a large ten that was usually used in battlefield being erected there. I changed direction to there──

「Tsu!」

Gin!

Nero used its whisker to deflect the arrow that came flying this way.

It seemed they had posted an archer as lookout. As expected they were different from bandits. I calculated the shooter's position from the direction the arrow flew from and returned fire using a normal crossbow loaded with poison arrow that I took out from my Storage.

The archer fell from the tree. It seemed that my arrow luckily hit him. But, I couldn't launch a surprise attack now after counterattacking their surprise attack. We leaped out from the trees to the ground, showing ourselves to the knights near the tent.

「Aria-!」

「Elena……you're safe.」

There wasn't even any time to feel relieve hearing that voice. The knights drew out their weapons warily toward Nero and me and formed formation.

Rank 3 knights who seemed to be as strong as Joey were surrounding Elena and the boy called Nathanital while pointing their weapons toward us. Then a man at his thirty who seemed to be the company commander and a middle-aged man who seemed to be a noble quietly stepped forward while being protected by the knights.

「As expected from "Rainbow Sword". So you defeated my subordinates in that age and caught up with us already……」

「Ludger-, what is that beast!? Is the academy keeping that kind of monster!?」

「No, Viscount Savoie. Most likely it's a monster that got tamed by that adventurer girl……Lady Aria, I ask you to send off that beast from this place. If you refuse, an injury that cannot be healed will be left behind on the face of that boy over there.」

「Hih……」

Nathanital got a short sword pointed to his face by the knight who was holding him. He let out a small scream with a fearful look. Then the knight

captain called Ludger spoke up again.

「You too should understand this situation if you are the princess's bodyguard. Throw away your weapon and surrender. To be honest, I don't want to turn a famous adventurer party into enemy. I shall promise you a greater amount of payment if you continue to guard the princess at our side.」

「……Nero, leave.」

「……」

Nero understood the situation and returned to the forest when I spoke to it. Then it hid itself.

Besides I had heard the name of that Viscount Savoie somewhere. I believed it was Sera who told me. He should be a noble from the noble faction who was famous for being radical.

The noble faction that had stayed quiet for some time was starting to move again……. That Viscount Savoie smiled in relief seeing Nero gone and talked to the captured Elena.

「That was a bit unexpected but, can I ask your highness to also tell your bodyguard to surrender? We have no intention to do anything to your highness if your highness proof obedient, but we will have to rely on *this* if your highness keeps acting rebellious like that.」

「……」

Viscount Savoie shook a small black bottle with his fingers to show it off. It caused Elena's face to twist in disgust.

That bottle……I once saw it at master's place. The bottle was empty, but that should be a sealed bottle that contained special medicine that the [evil race] used.

I didn’t know what kind of drug it was, but guessing from Elena’s expression, it must be something like a paralyzing medicine to rob the consumer of their free will and reduced them into a state that was just a step shy from being an invalid. It seemed the intention of the knights was to have Elena as their alliance leader, but the that didn’t mean the intention of the noble faction was just that. At the worst case they could just turn Elena into an invalid to be used as a threat against the young second prince.

What could I do to save her? If it was just Elena herself, would I be able to escape from here while carrying her?

Even if I used Iron Rose, I would run out of mana midway and I would have to fight the pursuer in such weakened state.

Would Nero allow Elena to get on its back? Even before that, would Elena accept abandoning Nathanital to his fate?

Even if Nero allowed Elena who was close to me to ride on its back, Nero definitely wouldn’t tolerate Nathanital who could only tremble in fear in this situation.

Could I fight while protecting Elena against this many opponents……?

But, Elena had resolved herself first before I could decide on my answer and smiled softly.

「Aria……thank you for coming. I’m happy.」

Elena then let out a sigh before looking straight into my eyes.

「You can do as you like from here. Things will become difficult if you come with me. Even if it’s just you, you at least should live “free”……」

「……Elena」

She lived for the sake of the kingdom’s people. Even though she had risked her life to clear a dungeon and had her body healed, she still tried to become a queen and lived for the kingdom’s sake.

These guys would even trample Elena's feeling just to make their wish come true. Viscount Savoie frowned even at Elena's small wish to avoid involving me.

「Your highness……it's troubling for you to say something so selfish. Such skilled bodyguard who can handle that kind of monster will serve as a good fighting force. Please give the right order here, your highness.」

「You……-!」

Elena bristled up from those words that went too far. Even Ludger was frowning.

Aa, I see……

Elena was resolved even if the result that she obtained was "death".

So it was me who was lacking determination.

Then I too……would act "free" just as she wished for.

「……Iron Rose……」

.

My figure vanished from their sight in that moment.

「──!?」

My body left residues of light behind as though they were wings while I slashed the necks of the knights who were holding Elena and Nathanital with super fast movement. Then I held Elena under my right arm and grabbed Nathanital's collar with my left hand before swooping down on a spot that was at a distance from the knights.

「Aria……」

「Elena, I'll do as I please.」

My ashen iron colored hair that looked like scorching iron fluttered as I looked down on Viscount Savoie and the knights who were looking astonished. Then I proclaimed with a voice that was heavy like iron.

.

「I'll annihilate all of you here.」

Twisted Event - Second Part

「W-what, what is that little girl!? Take the princess back quickly!!」

Viscount Savoie forgot to even add respectful suffix when mentioning a royalty seeing me forcefully taking Elena back. He gave an order to the knights of the company.

The same method wouldn't work the second time. I had taken Elena back, but it was exceedingly impossible to escape from this place while bringing two non-combatants.

Furthermore, I judged that a bunch that claimed to grieve for the country and yet kidnapped Elena who was trying to settle the conflict within the country for their own need wouldn't learn their lesson and just repeat what they did even if they were left alive.

I'll kill them here. Only Elena I'll keep alive, even if I have to risk my everything.

「Aria……」

「Y-you-」

「Shut up. You'll bite your tongue.」

I shut up Elena and Nathanital who wanted to say something and faced the knights who came charging to here by the viscount's order. I used my muscle strength that was strengthened by Iron Rose in full to dash while still carrying Elena and Nathanital.

「HAAAA!」

I jumped over the spear tip that a knight thrust at me and stepped on it. Then without pause I ran over the spear's handle and kicked the knight flying while he was hesitating to let go of his weapon.

「You bastard-, how dare you!」

「You'll pay-!」

The knights swarmed me from the surrounding. I used the knight whose face I kicked as stepping stool and jumped. My right leg kicked the flat of an approaching blade and deflected it while my left leg snapped the neck of a knight. The kick that was backed by the weight of three people pushed me for another jump and I crushed the neck of the remaining knight with a kick.

「She's a rank 4 so don't underestimate her just because she's a scout-! She's using a strange technique-!」

The company commander Ludger gave instruction to his subordinate knights and the flustered knights regained their calm.

「Shield to the front-! Fire arrows at her-! It's fine even if the arrow hit as long it doesn't kill-」

They had completely stopped keeping up appearance now, although from the start the premise of their plan was to take away Elena's free will with drug. No, perhaps that too was because they had resolved themselves to die if they failed. Seeing the knights moving into action from Ludger's instruction, Elena who originally should be protected by them with their honor and life on the line tightly grabbed my sleeve.

「Aria……I wouldn't mind even if you abandoned me you know?」

Elena who was under my arm stared closely at me whose hair was dyed with ashen iron color while muttering something like that.

「I wouldn't be at Elena's side from the start if I'm going to do something like that.」

Elena was prepared for even death rather than becoming a puppet of the noble faction and be used to cause discord. I too stared back closely at her who was like that.

「Struggle against your fate Elena. Even if it result in your death, keep fighting it until the last moment.」

「……You're so strict. But, you're fine like that.」

Vitality returned in Elena's eyes. As I thought, that kind of face really suited her.

「Shoot!」

Several knights were approaching with shields raised before their body. Arrows were fired from behind them. Most likely they had predicted that I would [protect Elena even if I had to use myself as shield].

「Hiih!」

Nathanital whose collar was in my grasp covered his face with his ahnds and screamed. I "saw" magic particles of wind to the hand of Elena who was under my arm and I stepped forward without putting her down.

「──Air Curtain ──」

Elena's sorcery activated and the whirling air flow diverted the coming arrows. I already rushed forward at that time and kicked away the shield of the knight right in front of me. The line of the knights crumbled and I leaped inside while breaking a knight's neck with a spinning kick, and crushed the throat of a fallen knight with a stomp.

My movement speed was slower than usual because I was carrying two people, but it didn't mean that my reflex speed and kicking speed also lowered.

.

▼ Aria (Alicia) Race : Human♀ – Rank 4

【Magic Power : 234/300】【Stamina : 221/250】

【Overall Combat Strength : 1152 (During Special Body Strengthening : 2182)】

【Battle Skill : Iron Rose/Limit 234 Second】

.

Less than four minutes remaining until the time limit……. Two minutes would be my limit if I fought full strength by also using magic.

【Anyone other than archer is to carry shield! Stop her movement first-!】

Ludger gave another instruction. Even the knights who were carrying spear threw away heir weapon and readied their one-handed sword and the spare round shield that was tied on their back.

I would be in disadvantage if I got surrounded here seeing that I couldn't move with my original speed.

【GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!】

It was at that timing that Nero who should have left leaped from the side of the knight company and easily tore apart the knights who were completely focused toward me.

【Nero!】

【Uaaaaaaaah!】

I called out at Nero while tossing the screaming Nathanital. Nero made an annoyed look, even so it caught him with its whisker before it began trampling over the knights without even putting him on its back.

The pelt of mystical beast Coeurl had resistance against slash and thrust attack. If it was Nero then it should be able to fight against rank 2 and 3

even while protecting Nathanital.

「──Water Ball──!!」

In that moment, Elena fired water ball that washed away the archers who were aiming at Nero along with Nathanital.

The archers who realized that pointed their bows toward us. At this range there was a chance that the arrows would hit us even if we had the wind's protection. I put more strength into my right arm that was carrying Elena to protect her.

She who was a royalty wouldn't kill her own people. In exchange I would kill her enemy.

So that Elena would never get hurt again.

「Shoot-!」

The archers fired their arrows simultaneously. I kicked up so the hem of my skirt batted down the arrows that slipped through the wind curtain, while my left hand pulled out the throwing knives on my thing and threw them on the throat or forehead of several archers.

My speed increased after getting rid of one person's weight. Three archers crumpled down. I rushed to their midst before their bodies could hit the ground and produced cutting type and scythe type pendulums from my left hand's Storage while I twirled in the middle of the archers. The archers at the surrounding were torn apart while Elena and I looked like we were doing waltz with a ground that was dyed with blood as our stage.

.

▼ Aria (Alicia) Race : Human♀ – Rank 4

「Magic Power : 175/300」「Stamina : 189/250」

「Overall Combat Strength : 1152 (During Special Body Strengthening : 2182)」

「Battle Skill : Iron Rose/Limit 175 Second」

.

「W-what the hell-, is that girl-! And that beast-!?」

Someone screamed those words. I glanced to the side and saw Viscount Savoie who had lost most of his bodyguards losing the strength in his waist and fell on his butt. He seemed to notice my gaze and began to yell something with a fearful expression.

「Y-you don't know what kind of trouble you will get if you kill me-! Skilled asassins are already heading to the crown prince's location even as we speak-! I'm the only one who can stop──」

Doshu!

A one handed sword flew and deeply planted itself into the throat of Viscount Savoie who started to yell something disquieting. The viscount couldn't grasp what had happened to himself and his mouth kept flapping up and down soundlessly while blood bubbled out from there. Light was fading from his eyes.

「This spineless traitor……」

I turned toward the direction where the sword came from. Ludger who threw that sword looked at Viscount Savoie who he called a traitor and spat.

「Ludger……you」

Elena let out a mutter seeing that. Ludger who had lost most of his subordinates let out a tired smile that looked self-depreciating.

「Your highness. It looks like you have obtained a good bodyguard. We thought that we were thinking of our country and the will to save it but, it

looks like not all of us are like that……

What's the meaning of this Ludger!? Are you really sending assassin to kill Onii-sama!?

That's right Ludger-sama! We also never heard about assassinating his highness the crown prince-!

The surviving knights also responded to Elena's question by raising their voices. The company commander Joey also said it before, that as knights of the kingdom they had no intention of harming the royal family.

The kingdom……the royal family won't change unless they have experienced "pain" once. All of you too would lose resolve if you heard about this plan. There was no way I could speak about this to any of you.

How can this be……

The surviving knights dropped their weapons from their hands when they heard that.

Surrender yourself, Ludger. Even if you alone fight here……

I will never do that, your highness.

Ludger resolutely refused Elena's kindness and quietly shook his head while picking a replacement sword from his dead subordinate. Then he pointed that sword not toward Elena but me.

For the sake of my will, I have no intention of changing. Even if by some chance I manage to avoid the gallows, I shall keep doing the same thing as long as I live. Surely you can understand that right?

Removing the crown prince Ervan and making Elena to be the next king. We were also aiming for the same thing, but our method and objective were fundamentally different. Ludger could only rely on the noble faction to make his wish came true. If only he had more chances to know Elena, he might become our reliable ally…….

□……Elena. Withdraw until that black beast's position. Nero is my ally and won't attack you.□

□Aria……□

My hair color returned from the ashen iron color to pinkish blond hair. I was dispelling Iron Rose while slowly stepping forward.

□Ash covered hair……I see, so you're the "Ash Crowned Princess". No wonder the average knight is not your match.□

□Elena fought together with me.□

I survived this battle because Elena had resolved herself for me. Ludger smiled a little at my words.

□I see……. I request a duel with you. But, you are free to accept or to refuse it. I won't mind even if that beast fight together with you.□

From his expression I felt his will as a knight seeking for his last moment.

□This is a waste of time. Let's start.□

I spoke shortly and readied my black dagger and black knife in my hands. Seeing that, Ludger raised his lips in a faint smile and held his subordinate's sword with both hands without carrying a shield.

Even though I had mana recovery potion, using Iron Rose continuously until my mana ran out was dangerous. Besides, I would become unable to fight against a truly strong enemy if I used a finishing move to easily deal with an enemy of the same rank every time.

And more than that……I grasped my weapons with my own strength in order to respond to Ludger's resolve.

□□……□□

Ludger and I both readied our weapons as we each changed our position to counter clockwise direction in order to move to the opposite direction of the opponent's dominant hand.

.

▼ Ludger Race : Human♂ – Assumed Rank 4

【Magic Power : 134/160】【Stamina : 285/320】

【Overall Combat Strength : 747 (During Special Body Strengthening : 921)】

.

He was a rank 4 like Viro and Sera. Even though his combat strength was a bit lower than me, his experience in head-on duel against human should be overwhelmingly higher compared to me.

Ludger was excessively vigilant against me more than the gap between our combat strength should deserve because he had seen me using Iron Rose. I had no intention of using it any further but, I could still use it as "feint" without actually using it.

Gakin!

The distance was gradually filled and Ludger whose weapon had longer ranger attacked first. Sparks scattered when I blocked his sword with my black dagger.

In that moment, Ludger's left leg launched a kick from the side. Even though he was lightly armored, I judged that my stance was unsuited to slash his leg with my knife. I used my right leg not to kick back at his kick, but to entangle our legs together. My body got lifted up and I used my left leg to sweep Ludger's right leg.

【What-!】

You must have never faced an opponent who fought in this way in your training as knight or even in all your duels until now. Both of us fell together. Ludger quickly used his left hand to touch the ground and support his body.

He never let go of his weapon must be because he was a “knight”.

My hands had let go of my dagger and knife and I instantly got on all fours to land like a cat. Then both my legs kicked on the ground while I straddled him, took out a small crossbow from Storage and fired it at Ludger’s face. His eyes opened wide in shock as the arrow entered between his eyes.

You had the advantage in a duel. But, you were too fixated in being a knight.

I became slightly stronger again from this fight against all of you.

.

▼ Aria (Alicia)　Race : Human♀ –　Rank 4

□Magic Power : 153/300□□Stamina : 171/250□

□Strength : 10 (14)□□Endurance : 10 (14)□□Agility : 15 (22)□□Dexterity : 9□△ 1 UP

□Short Sword Skill Level 4□□Martial Art Level 4□□Throwing Level 4□ □Archery Level 2□

□Defense Level 4□□String Control Level 4□

□Light Magic Level 3□□Darkness Magic Level 4□□Non-Elemental Magic Level 4□

□Daily Life Magic×□□□Magic Power Control Level 4□□Pressure Level 4□

□Stealth Level 4□□Night Vision Level 2□□Search Level 4□□Poison Resistance Level 3□□Abnormal Status Resistance Level 1□

【Simple Appraisal】

【Overall Combat Strength : 1296 (With Body Strengthening : 1620)】△ 144 UP

.

【Y-you, what do you think human life is-!?】

I stood up after finishing off Ludger. Then Nero released the boy──Nathanital and he raised his voice with a criticizing tone.

【Think about something like that after you manage to survive.】

【You called it something like that……】

My reply that cut down his argument mercilessly shocked Nathanital dumb. The words that he was going to say next got caught in his throat. It seemed that he didn't expect that he would get argued back.

Most of the enemies were dead. Even the few surviving knights were lowering their weapons after witnessing Ludger's death and hearing the truth. I couldn't feel any will to continue fighting from them.

Even so, their eyes weren't dead. That was what made human who possessed conviction troublesome. Even though they found out that their conviction differed from Ludger, it didn't mean that their conviction had broken and they would surrender.

【……】

I turned my gaze toward Elena just for a moment. There was a bit of hesitation on her face.

In any other situation she wouldn't recklessly take the lives of others and considered letting them lived to use them as witness. But, now that we had found out that the crown prince's life was being targeted by assassin, these

knights couldn’t be allowed to be near Elena in order to go save the crown prince.

But, “I” existed for that. I picked up my dagger and knife and approached the knights. Seeing that, the knights, along with Elena and Nathanital turned pale. But then I heard a sound from afar approaching this way. I turned my gaze to that direction.

「Is her highness safe-!?」

It was the company of royal guards who were in charge of guarding Elena’s mansion who came rushing to here on horse.

The company commander was that knight who I got involved with at the beginning during that dungeon exploration──Mash. I recognized his face and waved my hand. The royal knights who noticed that Elena and I were safe looked slightly relieved and approached.

It’s amazing that they managed to find this location……while I was thinking that, I saw Viro riding on horse at the very back. The butler must have received my message and notified not only the knights but also Viro just as I expected. Even so, it must be thanks to Viro’s experience that they were able to notice the marks that I left behind on the trees along the way here using knife and caught up this quickly.

Nero already read the atmosphere and disappeared from this place before their arrival. The royal guards stayed on guard against the knights of the second knight order who had lowered their weapon while getting down from their horses. Then Mash ran until Elena’s side.

「Your highness, thank god that you are safe……」

「Aria came for me. Please restrain those knights. Also, there are still two female students who got taken away to somewhere……」

「We had secured them on our way here and left behind one knight to protect them. They had also spoken how Lady Aria saved them. But……is the traitor the second knight order?」

Mash asked that question with scorn in his eyes. The complexion of the survivors of the second knight order changed when they heard that. One of them open their mouth to justify themselves.

「Not all of the second knight order members belong to the noble faction-! It's only us in the company of his excellency Captain Ludger who know about this plan. The others know nothing at all……」

「I understand. Let's leave the investigation about that matter to the supreme commander Margrave Dandall. More importantly his highness the crown prince is also in danger right now. I wish to quickly send a message and reinforcement but……」

There was no time right now. Elena cut off the knight's words and started giving order. Then she turned her gaze toward me.

「Aria and Viro. Members of Rainbow Sword, I ask you two to go reinforce his highness the crown prince. I won't ask you to rescue his highness. But I ask you two to please at least secure his highness and keep him safe until the reinforcement from the palace arrive.」

「There are also other young masters and students with his highness. What about them?」

Viro got down from his horse and threw a difficult question at Elena. But, that was the important part. Depending on the answer, it would decide not only the request's difficulty but also Elena's own character. This was a test in its own way. I stared fixedly at Elena while waiting for her to answer.

「If the two of you can at the very least keep his highness safe, I will take responsibility for the loss of anyone else and regard them as a necessary sacrifice. That is my request to the two of you.」

「Roger that.」

Viro moved away and started making preparation to move after Elena gave that answer. Meanwhile Nathanital who heard Elena's answer widened his eyes in shock and started pressing her.

「Your highness-, something like that is simply not right at all-!」

「……Those words are my resolve as a royalty. That's what it means to serve the country. Even my own life is not exempted from that. The aides of his highness should also understand that risk.」

Elena's beautifully shaped eyebrows twisted slightly and she sighed while explaining that. Even so Nathanital couldn't accept it and pressed her even further.

「Still-!」

「Don't get any closer to Elena-sama than that.」

I grabbed Nathanital's hand that was reaching toward Elena.

Even though he was a baron of the robe, if a middle ranked noble like him would keep trying to make a direct appeal to the princess even without any permission, I would have to take Elena's safety into consideration and restrained him. That was part of the reason why I stopped him and applied a bit of pressure on him. Then Nathanital gritted his teeth and glared at me.

「I won't accept you! All lives in this world are god's──」

「UOOOOOOOOOOOO!」

The moment everyone's attention was on Nathanital, one of the second knight order's knight pushed away the royal guard knight who was going to tie him up and ran.

「Stop him-!」

Not all of the survivors were loyal to the royal family. Naturally people who were agreeing with Ludger's will were mixed in with them. He turned a knife that he was hiding toward Elena, in order to slow down the reinforcement to save the crown prince even if he had to injure the princess for that.

Even if they failed to recruit Elena into the noble faction, it would still be their victory as long as the crown prince was removed.

But, Nathanital who was frozen in shock was on his way.

「Get out of my way you brattt!!」

「Hiiih!?」

Nathanital screamed from the bloodshot eyes and killing intent that were directed at him. He would be killed if he didn't get out of the way. The moment the knight thrust his knife forward, I grabbed Nathanital's collar and pulled him back while switching place with him. I turned my body aside to dodge the knife while stabbing my black dagger from below the knight's jaw until it reached his brain.

「Hih……」

The knife's tip stopped right in front of Nathanital's eyes. I pulled out the dagger and blood spurted out from the knight. It poured on Nathanital's face as his waist lost strength and he sat on the ground. I looked down coldly on him.

「Do as you like. But, they too are taking action by risking their life. To live is to fight. Don't you speak of that life using the words of "someone else" like god.」

「……」

Nathanital was trembling while staring at the dead knight with an ashen face.

I glanced at the knights of the second knight order who had gotten quiet for some reason, then I returned to Elena's side and called out to Viro who was preparing to depart as reinforcement.

「Viro, our task is to protect her highness the prince. You protect her. I'll go to reinforce his highness the crown prince.」

「Oi oi, you're planning to go alone?」

Viro looked exasperated from my words. Certainly it would be better to have Viro with his abundant experience coming together as reinforcement for the crown prince.

But, just like I said, Elena's situation was still far removed from being safe. It would be pointless if we saved the crown prince but she got harmed in the process.

「If I'm alone then I can use the mountain path, which will shorten the distance and time needed compared to riding horse. After all I'm faster than Viro.」

「That's a big talk to your honorable teacher, you cheeky disciple. Okay got it. Take this with you.」

Viro laughed with his teeth bared. He then tossed the potion that he prepared to bring to me.

「Mana recovery potion? I also have this though?」

「Yours are just medium grade that you made yourself right? This one is high grade quality that cost 8 silver coins. It seems that you can't use that technique of yours while the potion is in effect but, you can use it somehow during travel right?」

Mana recovery potion recovered the consumer mana's gradually. Using it made Iron Rose harder to control, so I couldn't use the potion in the middle of battle.

Viro had tried to test if he was able to learn my new Battle Skill, Iron Rose or not, but he was unable to learn it because he couldn't see magic particle. Even so he had researched the skill's trait on his own during his attempt.

I gratefully accepted the considerate gift of my scout teacher. There Elena approached me and wiped the blood on my cheek with her handkerchief.

「I’m sorry for sending you into danger alone. But, I believe in you Aria.」

「Leave it to me.」

I nodded at Elena. Then in order to move easier, I tore my skirt that had become littered with hole from sweeping arrows away. It created a long slit at the right side.

I kicked with my leg that was wrapped with thin and transparent tights to check my ease movement, but the knights averted their gaze for some reason when I did that.

「Please order several more uniforms as spare.」

「Alright.」

Elena smiled at my demand as though she was looking at a troubling little sister.

「Then, I’m going.」

Elena nodded wordlessly at my words. Viro saw me off with a thumb up.

I drank the mana recovery potion in one gulp, then I sprinted into the forest with normal body strengthening for the time being until my decreased mana recovered.

The crown prince’s location was at the grass plain along the sea where the second knight order was carrying out their exercises. But, although I didn’t know the identity of these assassins, I didn’t think that they would attack at a location where there would be a lot of knights.

If they were going to attack then it would be somewhere in the middle on the road heading to that location. I could calculate the location to some degree based on the carriage’s moving distance and the routes along the way, but the assassins should also be able to do the same. That was why I directly headed toward the location where I thought it would be the easiest to attack if it was me.

But, it would take four hours to arrive there even with my legs. It was uncertain whether I would make it in time before the crown prince passed that point with my speed.

I was moving inside the pathless forest by jumping from tree to tree, and from rock to rock. Then before I realized it there was a black beast running in parallel beside me.

「Nero……」

「Gaa」

Nero moved its whip-like whisker freely like a tentacle to point on its back.

「You'll let me get on your back?」

<──right──>

I grabbed the whisker it stretched at me and jumped on its back. Then Nero sprinted faster than I could if I ran on my own. Even so I felt it was slower than if I used Iron Rose. I poured my mana into Nero's whisker that I was holding like a rein.

「GAAA!」

「Endure it.」

It should be possible on paper. Nero expressed its dissatisfaction when my mana poured into it, but I lightly stroke its neck to calm it down. I poured mana into Nero like when I poured mana into my pendulum while matching the flow of mana of Nero's body strengthening. I let out a small mutter the moment it matched.

「──Iron Rose──」

「GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!」

Nero roared from the rampaging mana that poured into it. My hair was dyed with ashen iron color. I pulled on its whisker to direct it away from crashing on a tree.

Nero was gradually getting used to the mana while I was doing that. It seemed to be pleased that its physical ability got doubled and sped up even more inside the forest.

Now, let’s go.

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

Twisted Event - Third Part

「Er-sama-, look at that-, the mountain is visible even though it's so far away-」

This time a field trip to observe the exercises of a knight order was being held for the new students of the sorcery academy. The crown prince Ervan received the task to supervise the new students and rode a carriage to head to the destination. A girl was also riding together in his carriage and she turned around toward him with a wide smile.

「Y-yeah……」

The girl was putting her knees on the cushioned seat while peering outside the window and rambling like a little child. Her behavior caused Ervan's expression to twitch slightly while he replied to her.

Field trip to a national facility was held every year for the new students, but excluding the low ranked nobles, middle ranked nobles and high ranked nobles had the qualification to participate in this event was so they, the students who would become feudal lord or the wife of one in the future could learn what was important for the sake of managing the country and how the tax got used in order to do that.

In Claydale Kingdom, there were more than 6000 noble houses if the knight peerage was included. Among them there were 589 middle ranked noble houses, And then if the 35 high ranked noble houses also got included, there would be more than sixty students from middle ranked noble houses and above in just one grade year.

Just the effort to transport that many noble children was already a large scale undertaking. Because of that the crown prince who was a second year

student had to come along as supervisor, but looking at the end result it turned out only around sixty percent of the new students participated in this field trip.

It would be a different matter if it was the usual field trip to an important facility within the capital, but this was a field trip to observe the exercises of a knight order that was carried out far away from the capital. The female students who had no interest in managing a territory tended to pass from participating in such event. In fact the number of female students who participated in the field trip this time was only five.

The students would move and do activity together to some degree when traveling with carriage for three days like this time.

Most of the times the high class noble would travel together with children from noble houses that were their dependent. But in case the number of female students was few like this time, there was an unspoken understanding that the young lady from high ranked noble house who could only bring one attendant with her would bring the young ladies from middle ranked noble houses in her carriage without regard of which region they came from.

But, the young ladies from high ranked noble houses and above who participated in the field trip this time were only the princess Elena and Carla from a house of count. Not a single person wanted to travel together with Carla, so two of the remaining three young ladies from middle ranked noble houses were riding in the princess's carriage.

And then this girl who was the last female student refused to ride in a carriage that only had female students in it because of her past experience in the orphanage where she got bullied by her fellow female orphans. But even if she rode in a carriage of fellow dependents, she would be the only girl there while she also wouldn't be allowed to bring any maid with her. There was no way they could do that. So in the end that girl asked to be allowed to ride together in the same carriage of the heir of Melrose House that was her house's caregiver, which was this carriage.

Geshi-

The heir of Dandall House, Rockwell who was riding in the same carriage as a close aide of the crown prince wordlessly kicked the foot of Mihail, the heir of Melrose House who was also his friend who was sitting beside him.

(What are you doing, Rockwell-)

(That girl's house is a dependent to your house right? Shut her up already)

(You too are accompanying his highness the crown prince as his personal bodyguard right? Peel her off from Er already)

(I don't wanna. That girl is troublesome. Besides I'm a bodyguard in case there is danger approaching)

(Even I find that girl troublesome. She won't listen no matter what I say to her……)

Misha-sama-, Well-sama-, let's talk together with us too-!

Tsu!

The two who were busy pushing responsibility to each other in small voice also had their expression twitched when that girl──Alicia Mercis called them with "pet name" even though they hadn't given her permission, just like Ervan. At the corner of their eyes, they saw Ervan sighing in relieve. It seemed that he had stealthily pushed that girl to them.

Aa~……Lady Alicia?

What is it, Misha-sama-! You don't need to be so formal like that with me, please just call me [Licia]. We are relative after all-

……Where did you hear that from?

Mihail's eyes narrowed when he heard what Alicia said. Even if noble house like Dandall could possibly learn the information that she was a princess who was directly related to Melrose House thanks to their

information gathering capability, it was a matter that middle ranked noble house had no way of learning.

Even Mercis House that adopted her and the apprentice knight of black ops who was assigned as her bodyguard shouldn't be so foolish to leak that information to her.

Then, who was it that told the girl about that? Mihail lowered his voice as a member of a high ranked noble house that was in charge of the black ops, but Alicia showed no sign of being bothered by that and tilted her head slightly while putting her fingertip on her lips with a natural gesture.

Her figure was like "a single painting" as seen by "someone" that got cut out from the frame and placed in the real world. Coupled with her lovely appearance, even they who didn't have any interest at her unconsciously held their breath.

Alicia Mercis. She was a girl who possessed a mysterious atmosphere.

She was the only daughter of a lady from Melrose House who eloped with an apprentice knight and gave birth to her at a small city, then she lost both her parents because of an unfortunate accident, and then she spent her childhood in an orphanage that had horrible environment. Mihail's grandfather, the current margrave of Melrose found her through his search and put her under his protection.

Her education as a noble was insufficient, so she was placed in a viscount house as adopted daughter instead of with a high ranked noble house, but in reality it was in order to ascertain whether she was really had the blood of Melrose House or not.

She didn't have the "pinkish blond hair" that was the proof of being a direct descendant of Melrose House.

She didn't look similar with the painting of the eloped lady that was still remaining with Melrose House.

Just those factors were enough for Mihail to doubt this “Alicia”. But behind that doubt was the feeling of idolization that Mihail harbored when he saw the dignified figure of that lady in the painting when he was still just a child.

That lady who was Mihail’s aunt excelled in martial art and horsemanship as a daughter of the family that was in charge of the black ops. When Mihail heard about that, he went as far as proactively learning those things too because of the adoration and ideal that he harbored for that woman and her only daughter.

But, what Mihail felt when he actually laid his eyes on the girl who was said to be his aunt’s daughter, what he felt was *discomfort.*

He couldn’t feel any dignity or strength of a Melrose from her. That girl had fluffy atmosphere as though she was born only for the sake of being loved. She was different from the image of “Alicia” that Mihail had formed in his mind.

Even Mihail knew that image was him simply him projecting his selfish ideal on someone else. But even so, each time he thought of that image, what came to mind was the adventurer girl he encountered at the capital who was now appointed to be the princess’s bodyguard.

Her blond hair had pinkish tinge as though she was loved by the rose of the moon. Her strength and her dignified beauty were exactly like the picture of “Alicia” that Mihail formed in his mind.

Melrose

But, the “Alicia” before his eyes was an existence that was the exact opposite of that.

Her speech and action were strange because she hadn’t received sufficient education as noble lady, but from her gesture and behavior, there was “perfected adorableness” as though she had spent many years copying the most commonly seen “perfect model” like how all noble ladies learned etiquette and manner from their instructor.

If there was a child who learned something like that not unconsciously but intentionally, that child must have something that surpassed mere desire, something that was close to an “obsession”.

The girl’s reddish dark blond hair rustled softly. Her appearance was still childish because of her low magic power, while the other three’s appearances had grown to make them looked like seventeen years old. Perhaps that was why she looked even more adorable when surrounded by them. Even Mihail who was feeling suspicious toward the girl had his gaze stolen by her for a moment.

「Nn~……」

Alicia tilted her head with that “perfectly adorable gesture”. Her eyes met Mihail’s and she put on a heartfelt smile that contained no ulterior motive.

「Licia doesn’t get it-」

「……Ha?」

Mihail was taken aback for a moment. Alicia leaned forward to bring her face closer to him.

「Because, any noble must be connected to each other by blood somewhere right? Misha-sama is my house’s caregiver, so I thought it wouldn’t be strange even if there’s familial connection there.」

「That’s……not exactly wrong.」

Certainly Mercis house that had been managing a personal territory of Melrose House was a branch house of Melrose House. There was blood connection between them.

But, this “Alicia” was adopted. Where did she learn that she had noble blood in her vein? If it was just that much then it wouldn’t be strange to hear it from gossip or something, but a discomfort was continuing to prickle Mihail somewhere in his heart.

「Don’t you think so too Well-sa……kyah」

Gatan- The carriage shook. Alicia who was looking for Rockwell to agree with her let out a small scream and fell on his chest.

「Oops」

Even so as expected from the heir of Dandall that was a noted martial family. He easily caught the petite girl’s body by simply reaching out his hand. He then warned her with a gentle tone.

「A lady must not move around inside the carriage. It’s also not good for a lady and a gentleman to call each other using pet name when they aren’t even close with each other, so can I ask you to please stop calling me like that?」

In respond to that chiding word, Alicia wrapped the hand that was holding her shoulder with her own small hand while smiling at him right from the front.

「Fufu, you will become a scary mister noble if you keep saying something like that you know? We are still students. There’s no law that say we cannot have fun just because we are noble.」

「I see……」

Rockwell’s gentle smile didn’t fall. Even though inside his mind was in chaos as though he was encountering a monster for the first time, he softly pushed away the shoulder of the girl who was snuggling on him and helped her stood.

But the words from that girl produced a ripple in someone else that those two who those words were directed at.

「So it’s also fine to have fun……」

Ervan who was watching the three muttered with a small voice.

The first queen who was a former viscount daughter was living freely experienced the harshness of the queenly education, because of that she raised her child on her own instead of entrusting him to the royal family's education system. As the result Ervan couldn't have the mentality of a royalty despite being raised to be the next king and longed for "freedom".

Even so he kept putting in effort in his own way, but his little sister who should be attached to him was starting to radiate the majesty as a royalty, while the high ranked noble young ladies who became his fiancées consisted of an older young lady who was detached from real world, a stifling young lady who seemed to be constantly at her wits' end, and a young lady who was dangerous in both appearance and behavior. For him who only had the resolve at the level of the average middle ranked noble, they were girls who he couldn't comprehend.

Clara who was designated to be the first queen had become weaker mentally since she was bestowed with the Gift. Even Ervan now thought that she was lovely the way she was clinging dependently on him, but as a man Ervan hadn't grown up to be that mature that he was able to support a woman who brought such heavy burden with her.

If Ervan was born as a heir of a middle ranked noble house instead as a crown prince, then surely he would become a feudal lord who was loved by his subject.

If Ervan who had experienced how it felt for other person to rely on him had ten more years to grow up, then he might become able to face Elena and Clara sincerely.

The love of the first queen who wished for him to be able to live freely could only make Ervan to grow up as a normal youth. The gap of mental age with his surrounding that was slowly widening as time passed was tormenting his mind. That exhausted heart of Ervan was jolted by the words of the girl who was raised as a commoner. Those words seeped into his heart like a sweet poison.

□You, it's dangerous to stand like that. Sit down over here. Err……Licia?□

「Yes-, Er-sama.」

Ervan called the middle ranked noble girl with a pet name. The girl who got called Licia also noticed that and smiled widely while rushing to his side.

Seeing the crown prince's action, the two who were accompanying him as [friend] and also [aide] and also [observer] exchanged glance with each other. Then they opened their mouth to chide that action, but before they could the carriage got shook hard and stopped moving.

「What happened!」

Rockwell who had the role of bodyguard stood up with his sword in hand. Then an angry yell came from outside the carriage.

「Get out of the carriage quietly! If not we're going to set it on fire!」

***

「Get out quietly! If not we're going to set it──」

In that moment, the carriage's door was blown up and powerful flame burst out from inside the carriage. The man in leather armor who was speaking and his surrounding were instantly burned to their bones without even any time to scream.

Burning flame. The smell of scorching bone…….

An extravagant black carriage that had gone ahead from the crown prince's carriage and in a distance about a half hour of travel was also similarly under attack. "A girl" (Death) clad in a mantle shaped uniform and light yellowish green dress appeared from inside.

Her jet black hair fluttered from the flame that was spreading through the forest. She swept up her messy hair with one hand while her sickly pale face with dark circles around her eyes was illuminated by the flame. That young lady picked up a carbonized bone and crushed it with her fingers

while smiling like a flower toward the dumbfounded and flustered attackers.

Did they burn well?

The attackers were flustered by the flame that suddenly burned their comrades into charcoal instantly.

The flame of the burning carriage was dyeing the surrounding with the color orange. The men in leather armor were surrounding it. They were members of the branch assassin guild at the southern frontier. Their mission was to kidnap the fiancée of the crown prince who was passing through this route.

As long as she was captured alive, even if she lost one or two limbs she could possibly be of aid in negotiating with her father Count Lester──the chief royal sorcerer who was said to have a stance that was leaning to neutral the most among the royal family faction. But the priority for her capture was low. They were told that it was fine even if they killed her in the worst case.

This plan to kidnap Princess Elena and assassinate Crown Prince Ervan was concocted by the nobles of the noble faction and a part of the second knight order.

Originally it should be the central branch's assassins who received the request about assassinating royalty.

But it became known that the central west district branch that was known as a warlike branch had lost several skilled assassins in these several years. The central branch that had the largest scale information network even through the whole assassin guild hesitated to accept this request considering the possibility that "Ash Crowned Princess" and "Thorn Witch" might be present.

The infamy of these two girls was so high at the north and central of the kingdom that the assassin guild and the thief guild that had deep connection to politic hesitated to accept the request from the nobles.

Of course that infamy had also reached the southern frontier branch, but one of their top brasses with martial disposition volunteered to accept the request due to the intermediation of a certain person.

Their true objective wasn't something like the assassination of a royalty.

That top brass moved into action because he was in a romantic relationship with that person in the past, and that person wanted to clear up a personal resentment through this request.

They received the location of Count Lester's daughter as a part of that job.

The top brass of the southern frontier branch was also aware that the girl was feared at the central as the [Thorn Witch].

But they didn't put any effort to gather information about how strong a mere noble daughter could be. They thought that the reason why the girl was regarded as danger was related to her political influence as noble.

The daughter of Lester House, Carla Lester……the "Thorn Witch" ──.

Those who were in the know feared the girl in all aspects, whether politically, or internally, or strength-wise. That girl with her sickly pale complexion crushed the carbonized bone in her fingers with a delighted smile like a craftsman who looked fondly at a well made coal that was his work.

□……K-kill herr!!□

One of the assassins raised his voice a bit shrilly.

Even if this girl was actually powerful, it shouldn't matter seeing that she was a sorcerer and girl. Even her appearance was sickly. Sorcerer in general was estranged with close quarter combat. They would lose most of their means to counterattack once their opponent entered the blade's distance.

Such common sense caused them to make the wrong judgment.

□Diee!□

They already gave up on kidnapping Carla after realizing that the info about her strength wasn't exaggerated. Furthermore their instinct was telling them that they would be turned into lifeless corpses if they didn't face her with the intent to kill.

The blade that was made from magic steel let out a dull glint. The assassin got close to Carla.

But, Carla wasn't just a mere young lady.

【What-!?】

Carla softly jumped and dodged the assassin's killing blade with a speed that was unthinkable coming from a person in dress.

Carla was born in Lester House that was a lineage of sorcerer and obtained all elements because of her father's experiment. She obtained immense power while losing her future at the same time.

What was left for her was only "strength" and the "fearful gaze" of other people that reflected herself. That was why Carla continued to be fixated with strength.

In order to destroy her father and this country that ignored his outrageous act, Carla had pursued strength by continuously going into dungeon solo until now. She had trained her body strengthening and martial art in order to face multiple opponents on her own.

【──Air Curtain Rock Skin──】

She casted two magic simultaneously to deflect the arrows that were fired at her. Then she pointed one hand at the flustered assassin.

【──Ice Lance──】

She fired ice sorcery that was the advanced magic of water element. The assassin noticed that and tried to dodge but the big ice pillar flew at high speed and pierced his stomach.

But, in contrast to the high level difficulty of spell construction and her cruel appearance, the lethality of ice element sorcery wasn't that high. The ice froze the wound and blood, so the victim wouldn't die instantly. In some cases the opponent could even counterattack.

Even so high ranked sorcery still used ice element sorcery because the intense chill the ice radiated could be expected to slow the movement of the surrounding.

The movements of the assassins were clearly becoming duller. The temperature of the area was also decreasing. They couldn't catch up to Carla even though they had the same level of body strengthening.

But there was no way Carla used ice sorcery just for her own safety.

Crackle!

Those who were knowledgeable about sorcery twitched in fear seeing the light that sparked out from Carla's hand.

□──Dig Volt──□

Lightning filled the forest that was tormented by flame and ice with a flash.

The advanced combined sorcery of wind and water, Dig Volt burned the assassin that was stabbed with Ice Lance from within. The electricity then flowed through the frozen ground and paralyzed the other assassins with numbness.

And then Carla immediately produced flame from both her hands. Seeing that made one assassin who was in despair to come to a realization. Carla had no intention of running away from the start. She had no intention of letting even a single one of them left alive.

Her smiling face that hadn't changed at all from the start told the man that Carla's only wish was to kill them. Then the flame that was unleashed at the next moment burned his body while words of resentment leaked out from his mouth.

Cursed devil……

Why didn't the attackers retreat at the moment their comrades were killed at the beginning?

From the start……they didn't run away and attack the girl not because of their pride or even stubbornness as assassin, but because of the "fear" as a weakling encountering an overwhelming predator.

Human dies. No matter who they are.

Carla killed someone not because so she could survive. Carla killed because not even his life was important to her.

"Death" was always nearby ever since she was a child. Carla who obtained all elements didn't think that she would be able to live a long life. Even her investigation from reading many books told her that there was no great person (human) who had all elements who managed to live until 30.

Carla killed human……Carla was trying to destroy this country simply to vent. She would drag this country to hell "together" with her who had lost her future and would die in the not far future.

For Carla who had lived like that since she was little until now, something like the worth of life didn't even reach one bronze coin, including her own life.

She didn't care anymore when she would die. But, until that time came she would bring as many humans as possible to accompany her to that world.

But, she wondered since when it started. Her objective that only consisted of killing others changed slightly.

It was since that day……when she met "her".

The girl whose hair was dirtied with gray ash, who continued to fight against fate with the thick smell of "death" wafting around her just like Carla.

If she was going to die, she wished it would be by “her” hand.

That was why Carla didn’t wish to be killed by anyone else than “her”.

She would become strong in order to get killed. If it was for the sake of that, she would even accept a Gift that a few years ago she would laugh off as worthless and. And even then she still sought for even more power.

Carla had a dream. The two would fight to the death on a glamorous stage where many people gathered as audiences and flame was enveloping the whole place. There she would kill “her” and get killed by “her”.

Since that time, her wish to destroy this country and kill her father gruesomely on the worst stage was reduced into nothing more than extra content in order to make the girl get serious.

That was why right now, she was even considering seriously to ruin this country.

Everything was for the sake of making the girl became serious so they could seriously kill(love) each other…….

【Fufu……cough】

Perhaps because she obtained a Gift, just laughing caused her tiny stamina to decrease even more. Her hand that covered her mouth when she coughed had blood on it.

But everything including this was just what she wished for. She would decide on her own how to use her own life.

These assailants who tried to take her life too, if they were targeting Carla because she was a fiancée of the prince even though Carla herself didn’t really think much about it, then surely the royalties were also getting attacked. That was Carla’s guess.

In that case “she” would definitely appear. She would surely appear in order to kill everything that got in the way of her destiny

Carla looked back at the path where the crown prince and the princess should pass through after this. She seemed to sense something and inhaled slowly. Then she began walking toward that direction with footsteps that were skipping in joy.

Aria
「Aa……"death" is going to come……」

***

「Who's behind this!?」

Rockwell and Mihail stepped forward in order to protect the crown prince Ervan and Alicia who was hanging on his arm.

The attackers who stopped the carriage that was boarded by the crown prince's group ordered them to get out and lined up in front of it. The royal guards that the crown prince brought and the black ops knight that Mihail brought were already killed.

Other than the royal guards, there was also a platoon of knights from the second knight order that was holding the exercise this time. But Rockwell who was the son of the supreme knight commander realized that this platoon was working together with the attackers and glared at the platoon leader while shaking.

「Rockwell-sama, I don't have any grudge toward you and the supreme commander but, everything is for the sake of a just cause.」

「What kind of just cause can there be from something like this-! This country will fall into chaos once more if his highness disappear.」

「That too is a necessary pain. We can't stop anymore.」

「You can say that only because it won't be you who feel the pain but the people……」

In the first place their standing was too different from each other so there was no point to have this kind of argument. The end result that they were

seeing was different from each other so they would never change their opinion.

「……」

Mihail was thinking like that and left it to Rockwell to converse with the platoon leader while groping for a way to save at least Ervan from this predicament.

Ervan was standing in front of the girl called Licia to protect her, but from Mihail's perspective, he wished the crown prince had the tenacity to survive even if he had to use the girl as shield.

That Licia too looked like she was scared in a glance, but there was no sign of fear in her face. He even suspected whether she really understood the situation or not.

「Allow me to give this offer for the last time, we won't take the life of Rockwell-sama and the son of Melrose if the two of you side with us. We will need to restrict your freedom to some degree though. So what is your answer?」

「Both Mihail and I will never agree to that kind of offer-!」

Ervan turned pale and held his breath when he heard the platoon leader's words, but Rockwell immediately refused the offer without even a pause. The platoon leader seemed to have expected that answer and raised one hand. The assassins who were wearing leather armor stepped forward.

「How unfortunate. Then I shall at least kill the two of you painlessly.」

The assassins drew out blades that were painted black at the same time with those words from the platoon leader. It was then──

Rustle……-

The animals inside the forest started making noises at the same time. Then something broke through the green curtain of the forest's vegetation. A pink

haired girl riding on a huge black beast appeared and lightly jumped over the head of everyone there who was looking up with astonishment while the girl muttered in a low voice.

「Nero, go wild.」

***

「GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!」

The black beast's roar reverberated through the highway. Then Nero immediately assaulted the knights that were scattered at the surrounding.

「What is this monster!?」

「Calm down-, raise your shield!」

The knights immediately responded with their weapons and shields raised. But although it might helped if they were wearing full plate armor, their current light equipment couldn't stop Nero's attack and they were blown off their feet.

Because of its big body, Nero aimed at the knights at the outer circumference instead at the center where there was little space. From its back I confirmed crown prince Ervan's safety and jumped down smoothly stabbing two assassins with the dagger and knife in my hands.

「Wha-, gah!?」

A man raised his voice seeing his comrade being killed, but I crushed his nose bridge with my elbow, Without pause I wrapped my arm around his neck and snapped it. The crown prince's aide, Mihail raised his voice seeing the two of us suddenly appearing and starting to kill the enemies.

「Y-you are!」

「Get back a little.」

I said that to him while flapping my skirt and pulled out knives from the slit to throw at the approaching assassins. One person got his throat pierced by a knife while two others dodged. As expected from assassins that were targeting the crown prince, there was nobody here who was lower than rank 3…….

I dashed in that moment and pulled out the scythe type pendulum and tore the throat of a nearby man who was approaching me as we passed each other. Another man closed the distance and thrust his knife. I dodged by bending backward while somersaulting and kicking up the man's jaw with the tip of my shoes. At the same time I threw the slashing type pendulum to tear his now defenseless neck, finishing him off.

「Hiuh……」

Splashing blood. Lives that were vanishing like plucked flowers. The girl who was clinging on the crown prince let out a stifled scream seeing my figure killing the enemies dispassionately. One of the assassins noticed that and started dashing to take them hostage.

「I won't let you-!」

「Rockwell-!」

The other aide of the crown prince interposed himself between them. Mihail yelled the name of that youth.

The youth had a body built like a knight and he seemed to be well trained, but the person himself must have noticed that it would be impossible for him to stop a rank 3 assassin barehanded.

「Get out of my way-!」

Even so Rockwell wouldn't move out of the way. The assassin brandished up a one-handed sword.

In that moment, I pitched forward while grabbing the ground with my nails and kicked on the ground to leap forward. I jumped on the assassin's back

from behind and used my momentum to throw him on the ground before breaking his neck with my knee.

His neck made a sound like a wooden branch wrapped in wet rag getting broken. The crown prince and his friends reflexively averted their gaze. Meanwhile I picked the one-handed sword the assassin was using and tossed it to the still dumbfounded Rockwell.

「You are her highness's……」

「I accepted a reinforcement request from her highness the princess for his highness the crown prince. Don't lose focus when there are enemies. Pick up a weapon if you still have the will to fight. You have something that you have to protect right?」

「Ye……yeah, that's right!」

Rockwell took the sword and nodded strongly. Nero was taking on the second knight order's platoon, so it would be fine to leave them to it.

.

When I drew out my black knife in order to deal with the assassins, I felt an intense killing intent in that moment and I jumped aside to dodge while throwing my knife to that direction.

Gin!

My knife that was thrown to the killing intent's owner was deflected.

That man immediately threw something like a hatchet at me, but I sensed that I wouldn't be able to deflect the hatchet that was approaching while making a roaring sound. I jumped to the side to dodge that attack, but that man approached me in the meantime.

GOOOH!

He unleashed a kick that caused a loud wind pressure. When I blocked it with my heel and kicked on it to take a distance, the man brandished his hatchet toward me who was midair.

「──Vorpal Blade──」

Multiple slashes were fired toward me in that moment.

「Tsu!」

I kicked on empty air to change my posture while twisting my body to dodge the blade waves. Then I fell on the ground and dropped on my knee. My gaze crossed with that man's gaze.

「Hoo……to think there's someone who can dodge this Battle Skill.」

「……」

I couldn't dodge them all. Blood trickled from my right cheek that got grazed and my side that got slightly cut. My hand was pressing on the wound on my side. Who was this person who used level 5 battle Skill just like that man who was my nemesis?

「Who?」

「Is there any assassin who will answer when asked for his identity? Is what I want to say but, I'll tell you. I'm one of the leaders of the southern frontier branch, Gilgan-sama. Your appearance, your strength, I know who you are. You are "Ash Crowned" huh?」

.

▼ Gilgan　Race : Human♂ –　Assumed Rank 5

「Magic Power : 184/200」「Stamina : 402/410」

「Overall Combat Strength : 1344 (During Special Body Strengthening : 1712)」

.

The man with the rough appearance of someone at his forty laughed like a beast that was baring its fangs.

A leader of the southern frontier assassin guild branch huh……. It seemed they were very serious in their attempt to kill the crown prince that they sent someone at this level.

What was their true intention? Was it for putting Elena on the throne to govern this country along their wish just like that Joey said? If they were going to go as far as drugging Elena so they would listen to them, why couldn't they do the same with the crown prince…….

I didn't have enough information. I continued the conversation. I wasn't good at it but, perhaps I would be able to draw out some info from him.

「Why do you think I'm *that*?」

Gilgan looked exasperated when I asked him that.

「Hah, I'll go crazy if there are that many little girl in this world with combat strength like yours-. Me being someone from the assassin guild is already enough reason to realize your identity right? There are tons of guys who hold grudge at you.」

Before this I also got targeted near the capital by the remnants of the northern frontier branch, but it seemed that wasn't the end of it. Gilgan grinned when he saw me reaching that conclusion.

「My past girlfriend asked me a favor to take care of you, but there's also someone else. This guy told me about your appearance, your favorite tactic, the countermeasure for that, and even how the effective way to draw you out to the open is by aiming at the "princess".」

「……What?」

「Information goes everywhere in the underworld. The average guys will flinch from targeting the princess you're protecting, but it's also natural that there are those who want to try to fight someone that strong that can do something like that right? When I got this information, that person told me to tell you about this if I run into you by some chance. Isn't it an amusing story?」

「……」

Targeting Elena was a shortcut to fight me.

I knew of someone else who also said something like that before. I also heard how this person was recently involved with the commotion in the capital.

Grave huh…….

I was convinced with this. That man was finally starting to take action.

I stood up while my hand kept pressing on my side. Gilgan kept his focus fixed on me while glancing at Nero.

「So that's a Coeurl……it's even more a monster than what I heard. But we are both rank 5. I'll manage easily if I have several men with me. This great me will eliminate all of you together.」

Gilgan held a hatchet in each hand and smiled like a beast.

Gilgan's fighting style was to hold one-handed sword in each hand. That reminded me of Grave.

The current me still wouldn't be able to use Iron Rose for some time because of using mana recovery potion during the travel to this location.

Gilgan seemed worried of Nero's interruption, but I had no intention of handing my enemy to Nero.

Even if I couldn’t use Iron Rose, even if the enemy was a veteran rank 5, I wouldn’t take even a single step back now that I had stood on the same stage with them.

I sheathed the black dagger and knife and took out the scythe and weight type pendulums from the Storage to my hands. I gave them a twirl.

Gilgan was rank 5 and I was rank 4. The difference between us wasn’t only in combat strength, there should also be greater gap in our actual strength and experience. But, in order to fight Grave who had the same fighting style, I had to defeat this guy by myself alone.

「……What are you doing?」

Gilgan frowned seeing me putting away my knife and dagger and readying two pendulums instead.

「You want me to fight “seriously” right? Is it your style to ask every single trivia in battlefield?」

Anyone could reach rank 3 if they spent time putting in effort. But to reach higher than that, “something” that no ordinary person had was required.

Human could obtain immense power by discarding something important to them as a human, whether it was because of madness, obsession, or an oath to themselves. That was exactly why between monster and human of the same rank, I was warier toward the human.

「Hah, you got that right. In that case――」

The moment Gilgan was talking, *Bam!* I kicked on the ground with body strengthening at full tilt right from the start. My foot left a crack on the ground and I passed one of the assassins who were moving to surround us. The scythe type pendulum tore his throat in my wake.

「……a?」

That man let out a puzzled voice while blood spurted out a moment later. I used that blood spray as cover for the weight type pendulum that I threw. It swung down on the head of another man nearby.

Gokyu! There was a sound like a pumpkin getting smashed with hammer. Before that man collapsed on the ground, I used his face as stepping stool to jump. I rotated midair while pulling out knives on my thigh from behind the fluttering skirt. They entered the eyeballs of two assassins who were staring at me dumbfounded, scattering their life.

□Ash Crowneddd!!□

There Gilgan who was planning to have a “duel” with me finally turned infuriated and threw one of his hatchets toward me.

Unfortunately, I’m not so chivalrous nor so audacious that I could fight a duel while being surrounded by enemies. Even if the opponent wanted to have a duel, who knows what his subordinates who were surrounding us would actually do.

Then what to do? The answer was simple. I just needed to kill the nuisances first.

The hatchet made a growling sound while rotating through the air. I bent diagonally while kicking up with the heel of my leather boot. *Gann!* The collision made a hard sound and the hatchet was deflected to the wrong direction.

The boots that I was wearing right now weren’t the adventuring boots that I received from master. That boots’ appearance wouldn’t match the academy uniform, so it would cause others to be on guard against me. That was why I usually was wearing the academy’s approved loafer, while right now I was wearing boots that had magic iron plate inserted on the heel and the tip.

□T-this damn brat!□

One assassin finally returned to his senses from being a mere duel “spectator” to being a participant standing on the “stage”. He pulled out a

dagger from his waist and brandished it.

But that was a bad choice. Even though it looked like I was in an unbalanced posture after kicking up the hatchet, this was a battlefield that had “enemies”. Even if there was distance between us, I shouldn’t let down my guard for even a moment.

「──Gogah!?」

The weight type pendulum was swiveling and impacted the side of that man’s head just as he was about to dash forward. Blood burst out from the ear at the opposite side of the man’s head.

There would be no more moment of rest for all of you lowlifes. Multiple pendulum swiveled at my surrounding, forming “barrier of death” that served for both intercepting and attacking.

「Stop her-!」

Gilgan yelled at his subordinates and chased after me. This was a gamble where in the worst case he might take the crown prince hostage, but my first impression of him proved correct. Gilgan prioritized to fight me, the [Ash Crowned Princess] who had destroyed some assassin guilds.

「Guh!」

Gilgan tried to close the distance with me, but the third pendulum──slashing type pendulum passed right before his eyes in high speed. He reflexively put a brake on his dash.

I sheathed my knife and dagger so I could use four pendulums which was the most I could do right now. With my current skill level, it was necessary for me to keep both of my hands completely empty.

「Die, Ash Crowned-!」

The subordinate assassins who were ordered to [stop] me raised their weapons and blocked my way. In that moment, the scythe type pendulum

that was whirling as a barrier of death gouged the forehead of the man at the forefront.

That man screamed. But two other men used him as a shield and closed the distance. That seemed like a cruel act but that was the right move. The man called Gilgan apparently ran a tight leadership over his subordinates despite his appearance.

It was hard to hit me with throwing weapons while I kept moving around. That was why their decision to challenge me in close range combat while I was focused on using remotely controlled weapons with no melee weapon in hands wasn't wrong.

Gakinn!

「What-!?」

A spear swept at my landing spot, but I blocked it with the sheath that was tied on my calf and kicked back. It was a weapon that could block even an attack from rank 5 monster and wouldn't snap even if it used to give such opponent a finishing blow. Even though it was kept inside its sheath, it could block any attack other than special killing move with no problem.

I attacked with both hands and blocked attack with my legs. My fighting style was putting away my weapons in order to fight multiple opponents instead.

「Enough playing around-! Fight meee!!」

Even so the attack managed to hold me on one place for a little bit. Gilgan deflected the scythe type pendulum that was swiveling in high speed using his hatchet while closing the distance to me until close quarter.

I kicked the face of the spear user with a heel of the leg that I used to block the spear. That heel had metal plate inserted in it. The kick crushed the man's face. At the same time I sensed one other person attacking from behind. I made the weight type pendulum to turn and wrapped around his neck to strangle him.

I sealed the attack from behind. But, Gilgan was approaching from the front.

I strongly pulled the string that I directed to my back to strangle that man to death. At the same time I also used the recoil from pulling the string to take even more distance from Gilgan.

「Fight me properly, Ash Crowned-!!」

「I'm amazed you can say that after surrounding one girl with this many men.」

I dodged Gilgan's pursuing attack while murdering the encirclement one after another. Then an assassin that I was approaching turned his back on me and ran away.

Don't get scared even if you feel fear. Don't run away even if you're retreating. Fear will kill your heart you know?

The swiveling weight type pendulum grazed the head of the man who was seized by fear. It reaped his consciousness for just an instant. I leaped at him during that instant and kneed the back of his head. Without pause I wrapped my legs around the man's head and I rotated. His neck was snapped at the same time with my landing.

「That is her highness's bodyguard……?」

「……That's right.」

Even though Rockwell was taking a fight stance with a weapon that was taken away from an enemy, he was unable to join the fight. Far from that, he couldn't even take a step from where he was standing.

Rockwell had a margrave who was this country's supreme knight commander as his father, and most likely he would succeed his father's position in around ten or twenty years from now. Because of that he had been given the training within the best environment in this country to become the greatest knight.

Although the old Dandall Dukedom was absorbed by Claydale Kingdom due to the difference in national power, it was originally a military country. The bloodline of Dandall House that was the royal family of that country in the past was pushing up Rockwell to stand above everyone in his generations in the matter of strength.

His talent was the real deal as could be seen from how he had reached rank 3 while still enrolling in the academy. He had the confidence that he wouldn't lose even against a royal guard if he had a sword in hand.

He would become the greatest knight in this country. And for this youth, the greatest knight also meant [the strongest knight]. But as he grew up, he noticed that what was sought from the person who would become this country's supreme knight commander wasn't individual might, but political power and leadership ability.

He wished to become strong. But as he matured his adult self soothed his childish self that just strength wouldn't be enough.

But, the battle of the pink haired girl who was killing the enemies before his eyes as though she was dancing was in a different dimension. It completely destroyed Rockwell's sense of value.

If he could be honest, he felt fear at the girl who was killing humans without showing any emotion. His legs were shaking and couldn't move, and his hand also couldn't let go of the sword handle in its grasp.

But at the same time, Rockwell couldn't avert his gaze from the girl. The wish of wanting to become strong that he had sealed deep inside him until now was making his hand to clench on the sword handle with unusual strength.

□……□

Mihail who replied to the muttering of such Rockwell just now was different from his friend. While his friend was watching with a yearning somewhere within his eyes, he was staring at the blood soaked girl with a pained gaze.

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「Why……」

The crown prince Ervan who was being protected by those two was standing several steps behind them. He was staring at the girl just like the two, even so his complexion was pale.

It was the adventurer girl who he encountered several years ago when he sneaked out to the capital. When he met her for the first time, he naively idolized her for being an adventurer at such young age. He also harbored a feeling that surpassed mere interest when the girl who was living like that showed him her cuteness. But……

「Why, is she able to kill that easily……?」

Ervan's mother, the first queen who was formerly a viscount daughter had been telling her son the stories when she still had freedom as mere viscount daughter even while enduring the tyranny of the high ranked nobles. It made him wished that he also wanted to live like that.

Because of that he wished to sneak out to the city. The girl who he encountered there was also like a symbol of freedom for Ervan who was tormented by his responsibility and heavy pressure.

But, that girl who became the bodyguard maid of his little sister the princess was becoming an existence that was far removed from that. Was this what it meant to serve the royal family? Was this blood soaked path the world that the royalty had to walk on? Ervan was staring at the girl with a feeling that was similar to despair.

A small warm hand softly wrapped around Ervan's trembling hand.

「……Licia?」

「It's alright Er-sama. This world isn't filled with only scary things like that. There are a lot of beautiful things in this world. If you don't want to look at the scary things, please look at me right now. I will smile forever for you.」

Licia said that and smiled sweetly. Ervan whose mind was driven to the corner finally put on a twitching smile as though he had found an *escape path*. He softly grasped the girl's hand back……that act drove a wedge called "guilt" into the bond between Ervan and Clara.

.

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

Around that time, the mythical beast Coeurl, aka Nero were playing with several human knights.

It knew that even among humans there were particularly strong individual like Aria or the one that tricked it. Even so human was weakling for Nero. It was thinking that there was almost none of them who could defeat it by themselves.

For Nero, Aria was other who it got interested with for the first time. At first it was at her side in order to hunt their shared enemy together, but Aria's eyes were constantly looking at the sky despite living in solitude just like Nero. Nero felt the "moon" that illuminated the endlessly dark night inside such Aria. It made Nero wanted to watch her life.

If she stayed like as she was, then there would also be times like this when it lent her a hand based on its whim. Human was weakling. But, Nero had also learned that they would be a threat to it if they grouped up.

Nero was playing with the knights as practice for that kind of fight. Then it suddenly leaped away and growled warily at the forest behind the knights.

The next moment──

GOAAAAAAAAA!

A bear monster appeared from the forest behind the knights. The knights hurriedly turned their shields toward it.

What's this thing-!?

「Blue Shelled Bear-! Why is it in this kind of place!?」

Blue Shelled Bear was a monster that preyed on crab and took in their chitin to become a hardened part of its skin due to magic particles. It was a rank 3, but the hardness of its skin mde the adventurer guild to raise its difficulty level to rank 4. It was a powerful specimen.

Even so it wasn't any threat for a mythical beast like Nero.

Then what was Nero being wary to?

That Blue Shelled Bear too didn't come here to attack the knights. There were several parts of its body that had burn mark or gash.

The Blue Shelled Bear was running away from "something". There was an existence that could corner the Blue Shelled Bear that had subjugation difficulty level of rank 4.

GOOOOOOOOOO!

In that moment, several huge fire pillars burst out from inside the forest and pierced the bear's back. The scattered sparks made two knights became enveloped with flame.

「My. There's a kitty that look like it will give a lot of pelt from its body.」

While the Blue Helled Bear and the knights were being burned and screaming while rolling around on the ground, a black haired girl appeared as though she was oozing out from the forest's darkness. She didn't even glance at the burning victims and narrowed her eyes in delight toward the black mythical beast that was on its guard against her.

「Groowl」

The girl suddenly appeared from inside the forest and turned a Blue Shelled Bear and several knights of the second knight order into balls of flame. Nero sensed that she was the most dangerous thing in this place. It made its whip-like whiskers to sparkle while growling warily.

From what Nero saw, this girl's strength might be about the same with the [pink haired girl] it decided to watch over it guessed? But, just like how that girl was hiding "strength" inside herself, Nero felt that this sickly looking girl was also hiding abnormal "strength" inside.

「Ufufu」

That girl──Carla flicked up her long black hair seeing Nero being on guard against her. She narrowed her eyes in amusement on her sickly face.

Carla had seen through that the beast before her was a Coeurl based on the vast knowledge that Carla had been accumulating since she was little. It was a dangerous mythical beast that was rank 5 and it had higher combat strength than her who was rank 4.

But, combat strength was simply an approximation. This monster had sufficient ability to test her sorcery that she had continued to train until now solely for the sake of killing others. The thought made a smile to form on Carla's lips.

The Blue Shelled Bear was a monster that she found on her way here. It seemed to have this area as its territory and she attacked it. Its subjugation difficulty was high, a rank 4, but it was simply a foolish prey that couldn't even gauge Carla's true strength.

It was unclear why it was staying in this area but, that was why the appearance of Coeurl that had the intellect to be wary toward her roused her curiosity. She was delighted.

「Come to me, kitty.」

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▼ Carla Lester　Race : Human♀ –　Rank 4

「Magic Power : 425/530」「Stamina : 34/52」

「Strength : 7 (8)」「Endurance : 3 (4)」「Agility : 12 (14)」「Dexterity : 9」

□Martial Art Level 3□

□Light Magic Level 3□□Darkness Magic Level 3□□Earth Magic Level 3□
□Water Magic Level 4□

□Fire Magic Level 4□□Wind Magic Level 4□□Non-Elemental Magic Level 4□□Daily Life Magic×□□

□Magic Power Control Level 4□□Pressure Level 4□□Search Level 2□

□Abnormal Status Resistance Level 2□□Poison Resistance Level 1□

□Simple Appraisal□

□Overall Combat Strength : 1030 (Sorcery Attack Power : 1545)□

□Gift : Soul Thorn□

.

▼ Nero　Race : Coeurl – Mythical Beast Rank 5

□Magic Power : 224/280□□Stamina : 465/510□

□Strength : 20 (30)□□Endurance : 20 (30)□□Agility : 18 (27)□□Dexterity : 7□

□Claw Attack Level 4□□Martial Art Level 5□□Defense Level 4□

□Non-Elemental Magic Level 4□□Magic Power Control Level 5□

□Pressure Level 5□□Stealth Level 4□□Night Vision Level 4□□Search Level 5□

□Abnormal Status Resistance Level 4□□Slash and Thrust Resistance Level 5□□Poison Resistance Level 4□

□Simple Appraisal□

【Overall Combat Strength : 2136 (Sorcery Attack Power : 2704)】

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【T-this woman-!?】

【It's Count Lester's daughter-! Be careful, she's──】

The surviving knights of the second knight order realized the true identity of the intruder and raised their sword, while Carla who saw that lightly waved her hand at the nuisances.

【──Hurricane──】

A level 4 wind sorcery was unleashed. The knights who got dragged into that whirlwind got carved apart by countless small blades and then they were blown away.

【GUAOOOOOO!!】

Nero who had been watching the situation swiftly leaped in that moment. It bared its fang toward Carla.

A monster like Nero didn't use Appraisal skill but, in the first place Appraisal was a skill that turned what the user saw with their eyes, listened with their ears, and they felt with their five senses about the target's ability into number. Who knew about the low ranked monsters but, the high ranked monsters were able to sense their opponent's parameter to some degree without relying on skill.

With that, the mythical beast Nero was astonished by the amount of mana that it sensed from Carla, but her stamina value wasn't any different than the average children of human race. Just a small graze from Nero's claws would easily deal lethal wound on her──or that should be the case.

【GAH!】

【Fuh!】

A gust of wind wrapped around Carla's body in that moment and it made her floated in the air. She dodged Nero's claws like a fluttering leaf.

Body strengthening didn't only enhance attack power but also defensive capability like the person's endurance. That was because mana itself was covering the person's flesh. With that it was possible to obtain resistance not only toward direct attack, but also attack sorcery.

Also high ranked sorcerer used body strengthening not only to dodge direct attack. They used an application of body strengthening to envelop their flesh with strong mana to raise their resistance to everything.

But there was limit to the mana of human. Even elf of fairy race that had long life span couldn't rival the mana of low ranked spirit. Even if they could use magic power control, controlling mana while avoiding attack in battle was a feat that required abnormal courage.

By obtaining a Gift, Carla's body that was used to vast amount of mana could maintain mana in the amount that surpassed the limit even in normal time. For Carla who regarded everything as enemy and had continued to fight by herself until now, she now became able to cover her whole body with vast amount of mana and even used it for moving by controlling it calmly even in the middle of battle.

But even with that, it would be next to impossible for a rank 4 sorcerer to dodge the attack of a rank 5 monster. But Carla used her exquisite magic power control to control wind which enabled her to dodge even Nero's attack.

It was something that came from the strength of her heart and knowledge that didn't show in the number of her combat strength.

□──Fire Javelin──□

Carla stayed floating in the air and unleashed sorcery to Nero who passed below her.

For Coeurl that had resistance against slashing and thrusting attack, it was attack sorcery that it had to be careful against. But it also had countermeasure against such thing as long as there was distance.

□GAAAAAAA!□

Nero's whiskers scattered out sparks like electricity to obstruct the sorcery. The fired Fire Javelin was erased. The impact made Carla frowned.

Gagaga Nero planted its fangs into the ground, carving a scar behind it. Its body passed through like that before it turned around. At the same time Carla who managed to open some distance moved in the sky while firing another sorcery.

□──Ice Lance──□

Ice element sorcery would hinder the enemy's movement with its low temperature. Even so Nero dodged all the ice lances with only its physical ability and senses, but ahead of where it dodged, there was the Blue Shell Bear that had been turned into a mass of flame and currently going into a rampage.

□GAAAAAAAAAAA!□

But Nero tore into the throat of the flame wrapped Blue Shell Bear with its fangs without even a single moment of hesitation. It then swung its head to break the neck of the Blue Shell Bear that was as big as itself before using its body as shield against the ice lances.

Nero then charged after using the bear as shield. Seeing such powerful enemy made Carla put on a gruesome smile that looked insane.

□──Soul Thorn──□

.

▼ Carla Lester Race : Human♀ – Rank 4

【Magic Power : ∞/530】【Stamina : 26/52】

【Overall Combat Strength : 1030 (Sorcery Attack Power : 2957)】

【Gift : Soul Thorn Exchange/Life Time】

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【Ash Crowned-!】

I was dodging Gilgan's fierce attack while killing his men. Gilgan yelled in anger seeing that.

His attack that was approaching me was gradually becoming sloppier from anger and anxiety. Even though Gilgan was aware that I was a dangerous enemy who could destroy a guild, it must still rankled him greatly that a rank 4 which was inferior to him could lead him around by the nose like this.

From my observation until now, Gilgan had the ability to lead his subordinates and the decisiveness to accept a request that the central branch of the assassin guild was avoiding. But seen from a different perspective, I felt rashness and arrogance from him that was unthinkable coming from a leader of the assassin guild who was entrusted with the lives of his subordinates.

That kind of human had low endurance with holding himself back. Their anxiety and irritation lowered the precision of their technique.

I dodged his swing that went too wide with an acrobatic movement to provoke him, but then my foot got slightly entangled in the hem of my torn skirt.

【This is the end for youuuu!!】

Gilgan saw that momentary opening and threw both his hatchets.

A knight or the average swordsman would never think about throwing their weapon even if doing that would land a finishing blow. That could become a fatal opening, but in this situation it became the perfect attack.

「What-!>」

I let myself fell to dodge that attack.

You had shown your technique too much. Just like how Gilgan threw his own weapons without any hesitation, I also gave it my all to dodge only this attack without considering how to dodge the next attack.

At this rate the assassins around me would target me. But, just like how I had noticed how rough Gilgan's technique had become, his subordinates who were aware of his short temper feared getting caught in his attack and hesitated to move. Gilgan whose field of vision had narrowed from anger didn't notice that.

「Gyaaaaaah!?」

Because I got down on the ground, the hatchets flew past me and hit Gilgan's subordinate who was going to attack me. The moment Gilgan's attention was stolen by that sight, I kicked toward the direction I fell toward and rolled. I used my fluttering skirt as blinder and threw the knife I pulled out from my calf.

「Tsk!」

Kikin!

Gilgan immediately returned to his senses and he barely managed to dodge the knife that was targeting his vital spot although it still grazed him.

In that moment I tore the hem that entangled my foot while rushing forward and swung down my scythe type pendulum. But Gilgan deflected it with the protector on the back of his hand while suddenly raising his voice toward me.

「AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!」

「Tsu!」

Gilgan suddenly let out a war cry and my body stiffened for a moment.

What!? This wasn't Pressure. Most likely it was Gilgan's trump card.

I assumed that it was a stun type sorcery skill that was similar to my Pain. In that moment Gilgan picked up a sword of his dead subordinate and brandished it high to the air.

「──Vorpal Blade──」

He unleashed the level 5 Battle Skill for the second time. Multiple invisible slashes approached me.

It was nearly impossible to dodge from this close. Of course Gilgan must be thinking the same. That was exactly why I too had *predicted* that 「the next time he used his Battle Skill would be in this kind of situation」.

The stunning effect of the [war cry] just now didn't last as long as my Pain.

I recovered from the momentary stiffening and threw the skirt scrap that I tore just now to the front.

「──!?」

You let me too close. The small scrap blocked Gilgan's sight. It was difficult to unleash Battle Skill to an opponent he couldn't see even for rank 5.

In that moment, I crouched on the ground like a cat and dodged the Battle Skill's slashes and launched a pendulum that was controlled using the string that was tied on my foot at Gilgan.

But──

「GUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!」

Gilgan let out his [war cry] again. His whole body made snapping sounds as though his muscles were getting torn apart and blood spurted out. With that he forced his body to move and dodged the pendulum's blade that was approaching his face.

「……Nice move you got there.」

「……」

Gilgan bared his teeth smilingly with a face that was soaked with blood. Most likely he had a [voice] type skill. Even an attack that I launched at the risk of my life during a single moment of opening didn't manage to defeat Gilgan.

As I thought, my finishing move was weak. I finished off his subordinates to create a situation where it was a one-on-one fight, and during the process I disturbed the enemy's ability to focus and lowered the precision of his technique, but just that could only bring me to an equal footing with him, it wasn't enough to finish him off.

(Then what should I do……)

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DODOOON!

It was then, sound and shockwave that seemed to come from explosion of sorcery came from some distance away.

I sharpened my ears while keeping my eyes fixed on Gilgan. I could hear Nero's roar and a slightly familiar voice.

「What's that sound-!?」

「Who knows.」

I lightly replied at Gilgan who couldn't understand the situation. Then without pause I rushed toward the location where Nero and that fellow were fighting behind me.

「Where're you going, Ash Crowned-!」

Gilgan threw a throwing knife at me who started moving. I deflected it with weight type pendulum while dodging a "stray bullet" that came from behind. The Fire Ball landed between Gilgan and me and exploded.

The flame that was scattered to the surrounding burned Gilgan's arm. Even so he dodged most of it and rushed forward. The Shield that I immediately put up also got smashed. I received damage from the heat and shockwave, but there I put away my pendulums and took out my black dagger and knife.

「This is our battlefield.」

I'll show them my way of fighting.

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「……I'll go back her up.」

Rockwell hardened his grasp on his sword and muttered that. Everyone there including the crown prince Ervan gasped. They turned their gazes toward him in shock.

This was an assault from assassin guild that received a request from the noble faction and the insurrection of a part of the second knight order. In such dangerous situation, the adventurer girl who was dispatched by Princess Elena appeared here as reinforcement. She succeeded in diverting the attention of the attackers from the crown prince and other students.

As someone from the lineage that had produced a lot of supreme knight commander in this country, watching things unfolding until now must have made him felt conflicted. But, although Rockwell's sword skill was

excellent, it was only in [academy level] at the end. A careless interference from him might attract the attackers' attention to them once more.

Even so as a knight and as a man, continuing to hide behind the back of a young maiden wasn't something that Rockwell could consider as "right".

「Then I'll come with you. I'm no match compared to you with sword but, I should be able to be a bit useful with my sorcery.」

「Mihail……」

Mihail stood at the side of his friend who was going to head toward the fight. He turned a smile toward Rockwell even though it was just a bluffing one.

Mihail and Rockwell's thinking were in the same direction though there was a small difference.

For Rockwell, his yearning for strength as a knight that he had been sealing inside his heart because of his standing as a high ranked noble had surfaced back after watching the pink haired girl. He wished to stand side by side and fought together with her.

But perhaps the reason he couldn't accept letting the girl fought alone wasn't solely because of his pride as a man, but also because of another feeling within him. Right now it was just a yearning but, that feeling that could grow into something else was directed toward a girl who was currently far away from here.

Mihail harbored an interest toward the adventurer girl who he encountered several years ago. This girl was like a completely different existence than the young ladies who usually swarmed around him. Inside her he saw the trace of the aunt that he idolized in his childhood, and seeing her aloof way of living, it made him wanted to save her from the darkness of solitude.

Mihail felt pity seeing her figure that continued to fight in solitude. He understood that it was just his haughtiness as someone in the blessed

position as a noble. Even so seeing her made Mihail wished to become her support.

Even if the girl didn't wish for that……even he himself didn't understand whether this was a wish of supporting her like a family or it was a different feeling. But, just like Rockwell, Mihail couldn't accept to continue hiding behind her back anymore.

.

But……the other friend was unable to understand their decision.

「What are you two saying! What do you think you we can do by going into that kind of dangerous battle-!? Stop saying something stupid like that. Remember what your role actually is-!」

The crown prince Ervan stopped the two from going toward the battle. Mihail and Rockwell exchanged glance for a moment.

What he was saying was rational. Their duty as high ranked noble here was to survive.

It was a battlefield where the girl who was a member of first class adventurer party "Rainbow Sword" was putting her life on the line. What could they whose strength was only at the level of slightly better than academy student could do by going out there? In the worst case they might only become a hindrance for the girl.

「……Please forgive us, your highness. We can't simply sit still watching anymore.」

「Suppressing insurrection is a duty of high ranked noble. Even if our lives are snuffed out here, it won't be any fault of that girl who came here to rescue us.」

「No way……」

Ervan was rendered speechless by Rockwell and Mihail's determination.

Even though Ervan's wording sounded like he was chiding the two, there was also fear inside him. The girl was killing other people one after another as though she had no regard about the weight of life at all. For Ervan who had grown up until now without possessing sufficient resolve as a royalty, that girl was becoming an existence that she was unable to understand the most.

Even his fiancée Carla who appeared here before he noticed started fighting the big black beast. The sight of her killing humans without regards whether they were enemy or ally looked like the scene of hell on earth to him.

Ervan felt like that fear of his had been seen through by his two friends. Seeing the two stepping forward as a noble and as a man made him felt like there was a distance between him and them for the first time. He turned a gloomy gaze toward cause of that, the pink haired girl who was continuing to fight at the distance.

「Please wait-!」

There was one other voice that called at them to stop. That girl that still had trace of childishness in her appearance placed her hand over the hand of the dejected Ervan, while looking at Mihail and Rockwell with sad looking eyes.

「There is no need for both of you to do something so dangerous! 「We are human」. Please treasure your life more than something like a noble's duty! 「There are more important things than that」. It's fine to leave the dangerous things to the brutish people!」

「「……」」

The voice of the girl──Licia was pleading. But Mihail shook his head quietly in respond to those words, while Rockwell lightly tapped his shoulder and both them started walking toward the battlefield.

「Rockwell……Mihail……」

Ervan muttered the names of his friends who were walking away with a lonely look. Licia gently pulled his head on her chest in a hug. Ervan clung on the girl's slender body to take solace on her kindness.

Licia……

Yes, Er-sama. I will stay at your side no matter what.

.

Licia patted the head of Ervan who was clinging on her chest like a kid with an expression that was filled with affection on her face. She did that while staring at the back of the other two youths in puzzlement.

(……Did I do something wrong?)

Even though she had used the "heroine" lines that she learned from that magic stone, the two still wouldn't stay.

Her information was already differing bit by bit with reality. The existence of the heroine that vanished from the story before anyone knew it. She was aware that differences would appear in the situations with the disappearance of the real thing, but she also felt a clear difference from the behavior of two of the capture targets. She felt that she would need to gather even more information.

And then the girl who had forgotten even her real name and called herself as [Alicia] suddenly twisted her expression. She watched the pink haired girl and long black haired girl at the far distance with severity in her eyes.

(Thos two……are nuisances.)

***

Carla who suddenly appeared from somewhere was destroying the forest in her fight against Nero.

That power……that might be the power of the Gift I had been hearing about. Even my "eyes" couldn't see the upper limit of her mana. But, I felt

how the light of her life was weakening in terrifying speed.

Fire of hell that burned violently with your life as the fuel──was that the power that you wished for, Carla?

Carla was flying around using her bursting out mana while throwing herself into a fight against Nero who was in the top rank even among rank 5. No, if it was just based on her instantaneous destructive power, Carla's strength could even be in the realm of rank 6.

Attack magic was a weak point for Coeurl whose resistance was for slashing and thrusting attack. But Coeurl also had the power to obstruct the sorcery itself.

The two possessed strong power and thing wouldn't end up well if they were left alone, but affinity-wise it didn't look like their battle would be settled quickly, so I guessed that neither of them would be in grave danger immediately.

The surrounding area became swallowed in flame from the stray bullets that Carla fired everywhere without any regard of the consequences. That was exactly why I chose this area as the place where I would settle thing with Gilgan.

「You bastard……tsu!」

Gilgan who got damaged from that stray bullet pointed eyes that were filled with fury and his sword at me. As expected from a leader of an assassin guild, his stamina was only reduced slightly even though his left arm got burned. His combat strength also didn't decrease with any noticeable amount.

But that was fine. It would be pointless for me to lure him until "here" for a one-on-one fight if he would die just from something like that.

Let's finish this. This is where you're going to die.

「……Tsk」

I silently took a fighting stance with my black dagger and knife. Gilgan spat on the ground and raised his sword while lowering his stance.

DOOOOONN!!

Carla's sorcery exploded nearby. That acted as the signal and Gilgan and I rushed forward at the same time.

CLANGG!

Sword and dagger clashed with sparks being scattered. The knife in my left hand weaved through that opening and rushed toward GIlgan, but he blocked it with a short sword that was held in his burned right arm.

It would be pointless for me to get into sword locking contest with my inferior physical strength. But perhaps the same also applied to Gilgan whose left arm was injured. He let out a kick while both of us were locking weapons with each other.

□Hah!□

□Kuh!□

I too immediately blocked it with my knee but my light weight made me got blown away. But I intentionally blocked the kick with my knee to open a distance and acrobatically somersaulted. I kicked a stone on the ground at the same time with my landing. It stopped Gilgan from chasing after me.

Here I finally became able to fight properly against a rank 5 like Gilgan after executing various tactics until now.

Even so it still didn't change the fact that I lacked a finishing move because of the one rank difference between Gilgan and me. How should I fill that gap……I chose this place to finish this fight because of that. From here on victory and defeat would be decided by the difference in our ability to concentrate and determination.

DOOOOOOOONN!!

【GAAOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!】

【AHAHA♪】

Flame's heat and explosion sound, insane laughter and beastly roar.

Gilgan's focus was distracted for a moment by the heated wind and scattered rock fragments. I rushed forward while dodging only the fragments that would wound me lethally. My knife cut Gilgan's shoulder and it was followed by blood spray.

【You madlad……】

【Naturally.】

There was no sane person who would turn the assassin guild into their enemy even though they were alone right?

I continued to swing my weapons even while blood trickled from my forehead that got grazed by a flying rock. Seeing that caused the color of fear to flash in Gilgan's eyes for the first time.

【……aaAA [AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA]!!】

Gilgan let out that yell to inflict stun on my whole body.

【Tsu!】

This technique that stopped the opponent just for an instant was different from <Pressure> or [Pain]. It was difficult to resist.

I endured that instant and readied myself to parry Gilgan's blade. Seeing that Gilgan raised his sword and focused to unleash his Battle Skill once more. But suddenly "wind attack magic" that flew from other direction flew at Gilgan's back and cut him.

【What-, the-!?】

Gilgan spoke in shock. There──

UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Dosu-!

A young knight came charging and his sword tip stabbed deeply as though to gouge the cut on Gilgan's back.

The two youths who served as the crown prince's aides──the two successfully dealt a wound on Gilgan who lacked focus and turned his whole attention to me alone.

It was like my prey got snatched by someone else but, it was Gilgan's blunder to loosen his vigilance to his surrounding just from this much. If he couldn't do that then he should kill them from the start just like what I did.

Gilgan got wounded. But, it was still shallow.

THIS DAMN BRAAATTT!

Even with his back stabbed, Gilgan elbowed the young knight on his stomach, while his other hand raised a throwing knife to be throw toward Mihail who fired the sorcery that interrupted the fight.

Shit-

Mihail-!

Even this wasn't enough to defeat a rank 5? Just a bit more? What was needed? Speed was needed. Speed that wouldn't lose to anyone. I still couldn't use Iron Rose. But I should remember. My body should remember it. Remember that speed. My body knew that speed.

My thought switched track in that moment. The world turned gray and quiet as though the flow of time had slowed down. I focused the mana flowing through my whole body into my two legs, and in that moment, my body flew like a flash of light that left behind even sound. The dagger that I just barely swung forward tore Gilgan's neck deeply.

□UGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!□

Gilgan’s death throes resounded. I flew passed him and tumbled once on the ground. Even so I used both my hands to adjust my posture, then I cut in between one person and one beast who were about to clash with each other and released my pressure. The two objects caused dust cloud to rise up from the rapid break they performed. I pointed my knife and dagger to the foreheads of those two in the middle of that.

「You two should stop too.」

「Gaaaa……」

「Aria……you're soaked with blood again.」

Carla whose white skin was covered with pattern of black thorn put on a faint smile while red blood trickled out from her lips.

「……kuhaha」

It was then, I heard the voice of Gilgan who should have been killed. I immediately pulled out a throwing knife from my thigh and readied it for throwing.

It seemed that I really overdid it with my movement just now. Blood spurted out from both my legs as though the capillary arteries there were going to burst. I kept kneeling on the ground while my legs convulsed without being able to move. But Gilgan's wound was also clearly fatal. He stood still with blood leaking out like waterfall from his wound. Gilgan whose light of life was rapidly fading stared at me alone while lifting up the corner of his lips weakly.

「To think……I'm the one who lose. ……Ash Crowned. From where you stand, does it look like it was me who didn't fight seriously?」

「……」

The difference between Gilgan who was fixated with the fight and me who sought victory huh.

「It's your win, Ash Crowned……but, don't let down your guard. It's not just one or two people who manipulate this attack from the shadow……. You are also there, aren't you, Taba──」

Dosu!

In that moment, there was a faint whooshing sound that was accompanied by a black arrow that pierced through Gilgan's head.

「Tsu!」

I immediately aimed my throwing knife at the direction the arrow came from while turning my gaze to there. On a tree that was at quite a far distance there, there were two people in black clothes armed with bow.

「「……」」

Woman? I judged them like that based on their body build. Then the duo immediately turned around to escape. The moment they attempted that, Carla fired her sorcery to that direction.

「──Ice Lance──」

The ice spears shot through the air with unbelievable speed. The two women in black dodged it just barely.

But they were unable to dodge perfectly. One of them got grazed and black skin came into view……and then the other woman's mask also got grazed and I could see the burned face of a woman who was looking at me with hatred in her eyes.

And then the two women vanished from view.

That skin color……? And then that woman with burned face…….

「……Tabatha?」

Settlement of Fated Connection

Bam!

「What's the meaning of this-!」

Clara was listening to a report inside Dandall's mansion that was located within the sorcery academy. She hit the table in front of her maids Hilda and the others.

Clara too was aware that there was attack to the crown prince's group in the field trip this time.

But, although she knew it, Clara who was a reincarnator only knew it as an otome game event. The event shouldn't be anything like a scheme to assassinate the crown prince.

In the event, what the second knight order did was like a petition toward the royal family. But how did the assassin guild also got involved and things devolved into an assassination attempt?

The maids shrunk back with an awkward look from how grave Clara looked. Then Hilda who was like the leader among them opened her mouth.

「M-my apologies, Clara-sama. It looks like that woman was contacting the assassin guild under extreme secrecy……」

「That woman……you mean Tabatha-」

She heard that Hilda and Bibi who were wounded survivors of the assassin guild got their injury from a fight against that pink haired girl. They said that it was a miracle that they managed to live and escape alive.

In that situation, Tabatha who was the woman that the girls relied on and tried to sacrifice them in order to save herself also managed to survive even though as the end result her whole body got burnt injury.

Hilda and Bibi also had burnt injury, but Carla gave them treatment without any care about the cost, so their burn had been erased almost completely. But, Tabatha who had serious burn all over her body was still far away from complete recovery. Because of her appearance that was like that, she volunteered to work behind the scene.

In fact she was doing great work. And it would be difficult for Hilda and others who were still young to contact those people and negotiate with them.

「……I should, personally ascertain her characteristic a bit more thoroughly.」

「This isn't Clara-sama's fault-! If only we as her former comrades were more vigilant……」

Hilda and Bibi had gotten betrayed by Tabatha once, but they were unable to cut off relationship with her, partly because Bibi who was the youngest of them was attached to Tabatha. But as expected, even Bibi seemed unable to tolerate it anymore with what happened this time. She was looking down while biting her lips.

Clara's Gift, Foresight also wasn't perfect. In the end it was an ability that predicted the future based on the information that she knew. Clara was able to make more accurate prediction thanks to her game knowledge, but this time it was that knowledge that ended up making her slipped.

The events were already deviating from the content of the original game. Tabatha voluntarily working behind the scene also became a disaster because it limited her chance to come into contact with Clara.

「We can't keep allowing her to do whatever she want like this. Do you all understand?」

□□□Yes.□□□

□……Yes.□

Hilda who didn't have good impression of Tabatha, along with Doris and Haiji who didn't have any close relationship with her nodded at Clara's words. Even Bibi was properly accepting Clara's words this time.

□But……what are we going to do? There is no guarantee that we will be able to win against Tabatha. In addition there is also that man……□

□That man……do you mean Grave?□

Grave was living under the roof of the organization that Clara wished to contact. He was a man with dangerous ideology. That was exactly why she was wondering if she could use him to harm the heroine who would degrade the country, but in this situation she couldn't predict how he would move.

Clara performed Foresight using the current information. And then after several minutes of calculation, she derived a single choice.

□……Leak the information of those people to Elena-sama's faction.□

□Clara-sama, that's……□

Tabatha scattered bait in the form of the crown prince's assassination just to take revenge to that girl. She even guided the noble faction to draw in the assassin guild and that girl.

Kidnapping, intimidation, assassination, switching the target, every irregularity that went different from expectation was the work of Tabatha who went made with grudge.

When Clara made prediction using that information, it seemed that organization was targeting the princess and not the crown prince, but the possibility that Grave still wanted Ervan to die was high.

If Clara leaked this information, everything she had done until now would become in vain and the aforementioned organization would turn into her enemy. But right now Clara herself also wasn't calm. She was unable to forgive the people who was targeting the life of her beloved Ervan.

We're going to erase them by pointing the "Ash Crowned Princess" their way.

***

The outdoor field trip that should be held this time by the sorcery academy was interrupted by the scheme of the noble faction that was in opposition against the royal family faction. Plans to kidnap Princess Elena and assassinate the crown prince Ervan were carried out simultaneously. At the end both plans ended up as failed attempt and the incident had been concluded on the surface.

Of course the new students' field trip to observe a knight order's exercises was cancelled. The students weren't told about the reason of the cancellation.

The students inside the academy were also divided between the royal family faction and the noble faction. There was a worry that if the truth was known, it might become a cause for conflict between students. There was also thinking that the foreign countries mustn't learn about the discord within the country.

Claydale Kingdom was the biggest country at the southern part of the continent, however it was gradually starting to lose its strength due to the internal situation.

Currently a judiciary negotiation was being carried out with the captured knights of the noble faction. A purge of the noble faction from the knight order that was involved with the incident this time was being carried out under the command of supreme knight commander Dandall.

At the same time with that, the royal family was crushing the members of noble faction with rank of viscount and lower that were involved with the

incident this time, while also hastening the investigation to the high ranked nobles in the noble faction who cut off those low ranked members like lizard's tail.

One of those nobles was hiding the "enemy" of the adventurer──Aria of "Rainbow Sword" who thwarted the noble faction's plan this time. The location was in a castle of that noble.

.

You were reckless again……. It was something that I requested so I apologize for that but, leave the investigation of that man to me. You should treat yourself with a bit more care.

Inside the princess's mansion within the academy, its owner Elena was lecturing the girl who was her bodyguard. Aria who was sitting on the same table with her responded with a small nod.

(……Does she really understand?)

Elena was thinking like that while glaring lightly at Aria.

Normally Aria who was Elena's bodyguard slash maid would never sit on the same table with her. But, it seemed that she had really overworked herself in the battle this time. Her legs still weren't fully healed even after using Cure.

Based from a healer's examination, apparently her nerves got affected by mana. It would recover better by taking a rest for several days rather than forcefully treating it with medicine, so Aria was ordered to take a break to recuperate.

Right now Aria was a young lady of a baronet house although only temporarily, but she who came from commoner background had the tendency to make light of her own life. Others would take from her if she didn't take from them first. Such thinking might have seeped deeply into her that she was strict to herself and gave not a shred of mercy toward her enemy.

Elena herself was also saved only because Aria was like that, so a part of her could sympathize but, sometimes her heart would feel pained while she was looking at Aria who was risking her life in battle every time.

「We cannot become friends.」

Elena used that wording before.

Noble and commoner. Princess and adventurer. The difference in the environments where they were born and raised were just too big that Elena noticed the only way she could be together with her was if she tied her at her side. And so they went their separate way.

Even with Aria becoming a noble, in the end she could only tie her up so they could be in the same place. Even so Aria stayed at Elena's side because of her "oath" to her.

What Elena wanted to protect wasn't her own life. It was her pride as a noble……as a human. That [feeling] that she had never expressed even once until now was only understood by Aria alone in this world.

Aria too was living with pride in order to live for her own sake and not anybody else. That was why Elena swore to protect her no matter what the situation just once. Aria too swore to her that in order to protect Elena's pride, she would kill just one of her enemies no matter who they were.

They put their "pride" on the line for that oath. Even if it would use up their life.

「……」

The two were in such relationship that was hard to understand for other people, but with them being together like this made even Elena became able to see the part of Aria that she hadn't noticed before.

Aria showed a way of fighting that should be called as fierce during the exchange of life, but in her daily life there was a part of her that somewhat absentminded.

The two of them were still twelve years old……granted they would turn thirteen years old in several months, but they were fundamentally still children.

The two's body had grown up due to their mana. From a commoner's perspective, they looked like women who had just become adult. Not only with that, with Aria's mature way of talking and bearing, along with her appearance, it made many of the males who passed her turned around because of her charm.

No, it wasn't just male. At academy, Aria was tall for a girl with a dignified atmosphere. There were some number of girls who would follow her with their gaze when she was nearby.

Aria looked like she was isolated at academy except when she was at Elena's side, but it wasn't only because she was clad in an atmosphere that didn't allow other to approach, but also because there were people who were definitely captivated by her.

(I wonder what will those people think if they saw her hidden side……)

Aria wasn't someone who talked a lot. That wasn't because she was inarticulate or didn't have a lot of vocabulary, but because she liked to omit anything pointless.

Aria became mature as though she had skipped over being a child and a girl, but sometimes she would show a childish side at strange times.

Few people could notice that, but the time when she replied just now too, sometimes she would end a talk with very short word of 「Yes」, but at such time perhaps because she nodded briefly like a little girl, she would look younger than her actual age only at such time. Her look at those times was terribly adorable.

Aria had been disciplined strictly by her adopted mother Sera to be a young lady from a baronet house to be the princess's bodyguard maid. There was also the person's own qualities that helped her reached the level of the

average noble daughter in the matter of essential skill and conduct even in Elena's eyes.

But, her pink hair didn't have any curl from the start. Her hair was also glossy perhaps thanks to her mana. Aria's hair could be tidied up prettily without needing too much effort. For Elena who had unruly hair, it was something to be jealous about, but perhaps that was why a part of Aria was indifferent with her own hair. Sometimes her hair on her back would look messy after her training or other activity.

At such time, the bodyguard maid Chloe would gleefully combed Aria's hair for her like a big sister who was playing around with her baby sister.

It seemed that Aria didn't feel anything about other people touching her hair. At such time she would show a face of a little girl who was getting her hair fiddled around by her mother.

*It should be fine just for time like this……*Elena thought and stood up from her seat. She picked up her own comb and quietly circled behind Aria.

「Elena?」

「Stay still……Aria.」

Elena touched Aria's hair and combed it.

She looked down on Aria from behind and found that her neck and shoulders looked graceful. Elena's heart felt pained when she thought that she was making a girl like this shouldering the country's important matter in the form of "fighting".

That thought made Elena's hand to become a bit hesitant. Aria noticed that and softly touched Elena's hand with her finger.

「It's alright……this is something that I chose on my own, Elena.」

「Right……Aria. ……Thank you.」

The two didn’t exchange any gaze and stayed silent after that while Elena continued combing Aria’s hair.

Chloe who came bringing a fresh batch of tea stared warmly at the two who were like that. Then she quietly left the room.

.

Two months passed since the attempt to assassinate the crown prince Ervan and kidnap Princess Elena was carried out by the noble faction. The season was now spring.

The noble houses and a part of the second knight order that were involved with that incident were dealt with by the royal family faction behind the scene. Right now there were different noble houses replacing them.

Some noble houses of noble faction were gone and some nobles of the royal family faction got promoted to take their places. If asked whether there was anything that happened close by because of this incident, then perhaps the matter of a baron who possessed a certain territory getting promoted to be a viscount had to be mentioned.

Even Aria had met that former baron once when he became Layton House’s adopted daughter. This former baron was an amicable character who was affiliated with the royal family faction and he had done his duty diligently for many years. The main topic wasn’t that, but how Layton House that was managing a town that was located in that baron’s territory also got promoted to be baron house thanks to all their achievements until now and Aria’s work in saving the crown prince and the princess. Because of that they became noble of a new territory.

Sera’s status rose from a baronet wife which was categorized as low ranked noble to be baron wife which was categorized as middle ranked noble that possessed a territory. Aria too had her status changed from a baronet daughter into baron daughter.

.

—1 2 3, …1 2 3—

The night grew late. At Princess Elena's mansion, two girls were tracing dancing step lightly with the moonlight illuminating the two of them.

There was no music……there was also no audience. The only sound there came from Elena's rhythmical voice and the sound of heel clicking on the floor. The other girl who was serving as the dancing partner wasn't making any sound from her breathing or her foot step.

Tan—

"You have gotten a lot better, Aria."

Elena stopped her step and lightly exhaled. She looked upward at the pink haired girl who was half a head taller than her. Aria who was acting as the dancing partner smiled just a little bit with her breathing staying completely even.

"It's because Elena is good with teaching."

"Thank you. I too am happy that there is something that I can teach you. More importantly, because Aria has only ever practice with me, you have only gotten better at the male role."

Elena placed her finger over her lips and her golden hair shook as she chuckled. Aria lightly sighed without any change in expression seeing that.

"I'm not going to dance anyway so it's all the same."

"I think there will be gentlemen who wish to invite you to dance though……"

In exchange of the cancelled field trip……no, it wasn't the case, but the dance event in the academy that was originally scheduled for summer was going to be held soon.

It was different from a genuine party, but all the students had also obtained the qualification to appear in high society with their enrollment into the academy, and so the academy was periodically holding a dance event for student only as practice for that.

Usually this event would be held for students of all years, but right now there were still a lot of students who lacked experience with dancing because the time was still too early, so this time the dance event would be held for the first years only.

Because of that Elena was teaching Aria who wasn't used to dance, but the difference in height caused Aria to get slotted into the male role most of the time. And it seemed that Aria herself was also more suited to the male role rather than the female role, so she got skilled with only that part.

「……Are you really going on your own?」

「I have decided.」

Elena caught her breath and suddenly asked that question. Aria quietly stepped away from her as though to show her determination.

The incident of assassination attempt against the crown prince and kidnapping attempt against the princess that was caused by the noble faction. The viscount house and baron house that were the key culprits of this incident had been crushed, but in the end they were nothing more than the sacrificial pawns of the high ranked noble.

Elena too had tried to draw out information from the people that Aria captured through plea bargaining, but then "important information" landed on their lap from an unexpected place.

The source was unknown. Even so Elena and Aria didn't think that the information that was passed to them through multiple proxies was false.

Kendras House. An influential noble house with marquis rank that was one of the top authorities in politic and also economy even in the kingdom from their grasp of the right over Condo Mine that was located along the

northwest border. Even though that noble house had gotten into conflict with other country over the mining right of the mine and successfully took over the possession of it, they hadn't gotten royal family blood infused into their house for a while, so the house's influence over the kingdom was insubstantial.

That was why they joined the noble faction, but then it came to light that a traitor of the black ops who was known to possess a dangerous ideology, [Grave] was staying there.

Furthermore he was together with some people who were hostile against the kingdom. It was information with unknown source but, the black ops had investigated its veracity with the lives of their agents as the price and ascertained that the noble house there was almost certainly "guilty".

With Grave there, a large scale movement from the black ops would get detected and there was a risk that the evidences would get disposed of. I couldn't imagine that with his personality he would back up the noble faction until that far, but in order to crush the uncertain factors, it was decided that "Rainbow Sword" would go ahead once more to eliminate him…….

「But that will be too slow. If Dalton and Feld make a move, they will stand out and Grave will vanish. But if I go alone, he will definitely choose to fight me.」

「That's……I understand that, but still」

「Elena.」

Elena couldn't stop worrying for Aria even then. So Aria called her name not as a bodyguard addressing the princess but as a "kindred soul". Elena stared straight into Aria's jade green eyes.

「Believe in me.」

「……I understand. But, come back before the dance event. ……Promise me.」

***

I made a new [promise] with Elena and early at the morning I quietly left the mansion wearing not my uniform but my adventurer equipments after so long.

When we first fought, I was even less than insect compared to Grave. Even when we fought the second time, Grave retreated at the end but I didn't actually win by my own strength.

I had gotten stronger than that time but, Grave too surely wouldn't stay the same like that time. Most likely this battle would become the deathliest fight that I ever experienced until now. But this time I would settle this for sure. After all defeating Grave was one of my goals.

This wasn't just a problem for Elena.

I swore to kill Grave no matter what. This was my battle.

.

▼ Aria (Alicia) Race : Human♀ – Rank 4

□Magic Power : 136/300□□Stamina : 98/250□

□Strength : 10 (14)□□Endurance : 10 (14)□□Agility : 17 (24)□△ 2 UP
□Dexterity : 9□

□Short Sword Skill Level 4□□Martial Art Level 4□

□Throwing Level 4□□Archery Level 2□□Defense Level 4□□String Control Level 4□

□Light Magic Level 3□□Darkness Magic Level 4□□Non-Elemental Magic Level 4□

□Daily Life Magic×□□□Magic Power Control Level 4□□Pressure Level 4□

【Stealth Level 4】【Night Vision Level 2】【Search Level 4】

【Poison Resistance Level 3】【Abnormal Status Resistance Level 1】

【Simple Appraisal】

【Overall Combat Strength : 1339 (With Body Strengthening : 1576)】△ 43 UP

.

It would take three weeks for a one way trip from this academy to the territory of Marquis Kendras using horse carriage. I didn't want to spend too much time for this so I could fulfill my promise with Elena.

But right now I had an idea of how to shorten the time needed for travel.

【Nero.】

I muttered toward the forest. Then the magic particles of the forest suddenly thickened and the mythical beast Coeurl appeared as though it was oozing out from the darkness. It moved like wind to approach my side and softly licked my cheek.

The mythical beast Coeurl, Nero seemed to have decided to be at my side. Right now it was using the academy's forest as its dwelling. There was also rumor spreading through the academy about its rare sighting, but if Nero was wanting to be on my side then I also had no reason to reject it.

【Nero, it's a fight.】

【Gururuu】

Nero read my thought using electricity and learned about my will and the "enemy". It growled as though it was laughing.

If Nero allowed me to ride on its back, I would be able to save a lot of time for travel. The biggest cause of that was the difference if our moving speed,

but other than there was also the fact that other monster wouldn’t come picking a fight with the mythical beast Coeurl.

I stroke Nero’s fur and just when I was about to ask it to ride on its back, Nero’s whip-like whisker sparked in alert. Instantly I also threw the knife that was fastened on my thigh to behind me.

I didn’t ask who was there. It was their fault for standing behind me regardless whether they were “enemy” or “ally”.

「Gaah!」

Nero swung its whisker like whip. I grabbed it and it threw me behind.

The knife that I threw had gotten deflected by something like sorcery.

Fire Arrow flew at me in that moment. I too knocked it off with Shield, then I clicked my heel to produce a blade and kicked at the “enemy” lurking in the darkness. In respond that fellow lightly leaped while dodging my kick.

「……Why are you here?」

When I asked that question, she erased her killing intent instantly and smiled bashfully while her ample black hair fluttered. Her eyes were still surrounded by dark circles and her complexion looked sickly as usual.

「I came♪」

Forest of the Dead

「Carla……」

The one who suddenly appeared just before I departed was Carla Lester.

「I wonder if I can also come with you? It's not as good as the black ops, but I myself have my own information source, so I've been waiting thinking that if it's you Aria, you will definitely move.」

「……」

The combat strength of Carla who possessed all elements was approaching rank 5 even though she was only rank 4. She had equal combat strength with me who possessed close quarter combat ability and multiple sorcery skills.

But, Carla's stamina value was only at the level of a child because she had all those elements. Even that low stamina got capped at half and couldn't recover higher than that. I guessed that it was because the magic strengthening Gift that Carla obtained was continuing to shave off her life.

She was able to move well as could be seen with how she dodged my throwing knife and counterattacked, and she was able to converse normally. But Carla's body was far from healthy. Her complexion was white like paper, and the life force that was radiated from her body was so thin as though she was a ghost.

But, the vast mana and presence that were radiated from her whole body were inversely proportional to the transience of her life. They were surpassing even the mythical beast Coeurl.

Most likely her body was already unable to move properly, but she was forcefully moving it with her mana and sorcery. Carla should be aware herself that doing something like that was shaving down even more of her life, and yet she didn't stop moving.

「I'm asking one more time. What are you planning?」

In the deepest part of that dungeon, Carla wished not for an extension of her life but the power to destroy this country. Our path had separated there.

The path that Carla walked would one day clash with Elena who was concerned over this country. That path was also a blood soaked path where she and I would try to kill each other until one of us died.

Carla absolutely wouldn't change her feeling.

I too wouldn't bend my conviction.

That was why I knew that one day we would try to kill each other.

Most likely she knew that I was going to settle my dispute with Grave and waited until I made my move. I didn't know what Carla's intention for going there, nor was I interested.

What I wanted to know was her reason for showing herself brazenly in front of me like this despite our destiny of fighting to the death in the future.

「Do you feel like dying here?」

「That will be lovely too……but, this time your princess will be troubled if you go without me you know?」

Carla spoke with an informal tone that was unbecoming for a noble lady. She took a step forward until her forehead touched the tip of my knife. Red blood trickled down her pallid face in a line. Her deep red tongue licked it off.

I can kill her right now……. I watched her stamina silently starting to decrease as both of us glared at each other for several seconds, then she spoke up first.

「I'm going to clean up the "garbage" that I brought in when I was still a weakling. I don't need them anymore but, it'll be troublesome if they get in the way.」

「Even if being they're being together with my enemy?」

「Even if it's something that I already discarded, it's still not a good feeling seeing some other fool making use of it as they please.」

「Do as you like.」

I said that and pulled the knife back. Carla smiled sweetly, while Nero who got into a deathly fight with her last time was growling in discontent. I patted Nero's neck while exhaling softly.

「You must be dissatisfied but let her come with us, Nero. This girl will snatch even our prey if we just leave her out of sight.」

「Gururuu……」

「I'm not that hungry that I'm going to steal your prey though?」

「Liar.」

I jumped on Nero's back before Nero shook its whiskers reluctantly to signal to Carla to get on too. She was someone who had tried to kill it and vice versa, but Nero too must have conflicted feeling for Carla.

I too almost sighed, but I held it back while offering my hand to the approaching Carla.

「Carla, can I take it that your enemy is "those guys"?」

「……Come to think of it, have you ever heard about this Aria? Apparently there was a small village at the west that didn't even get listed on map suddenly vanishing. Fufu.」

Carla took my hand and got on Nero's back. She put on a twisted and cruel smile while suspiciously avoiding my question.

.

Carla would go off on her own to kill them anyway even if I left her behind. I didn't think that this girl would die that easily but, it would be troublesome if Grave got away because of her, so I could only accept her coming with us.

Perhaps it would be better for Elena's sake if I killed her here. Even so she was the crown prince's fiancée and it would trouble Elena if I killed her.

Either way it would be troublesome…….

If it was just for travelling then Carla should be able to use teleport type sorcery. Even so she said that she wanted to come with us……I didn't understand her. Even I could only say 「This is Carla we're talking about」 to explain it.

Several days had passed since our departure. Riding on Nero's back was completely unlike riding a noble's carriage. Ordinary person who did such thing would be risking their life. It made me amazed how Carla could still live even now.

It would take one week with Nero's legs until we arrived at the territory of Marquis Kendras. Naturally we didn't stop by at city and cut through forests and mountains, so at night we were camping inside the forest.

「We will camp here.」

After I made that decision, Nero went to hunt for prey like boar or bear. It gave me one leg that hadn't even gotten the blood drained out. And then I grilled it together with the wild plants that I picked up around here while

starting to eat it. Carla too used a knife to cut the grilled meat without asking, then she brought the piece of meat that was stinking of blood into her mouth without any complain.

Food was just to replenish nutrition. As long as you didn't mind the taste, eating meat without draining the blood would be far more nutritional. Carla who often explored dungeon on her own seemed to have the same opinion. But rather than something like that, I felt the sight of Carla eating like human looked out of place for some reason. Was it a problem with her humanity?

Sometimes Carla's stamina would become one digit while we were continuing to do such forced march, even so I really couldn't imagine Carla dying other than getting killed.

「Even I am a human you know?」

「You're the only one who think so.」

「Then we are a kindred aren't we.」

Kindred huh…….

.

If my estimation was right, we should arrive at Kendras territory in three days at this rate. It was midnight. I wrapped myself in my cloak and closed my eyes beside the bonfire, but then I suddenly opened my eyes. Nero's whiskers twitched, while Carla lifted up her face and looked toward the forest.

「There was a scream.」

「If I remember right……there is a viscount territory that is a dependent of Marquis Dans ahead of the valley at the other side from here. There might be a village too there……are you going?」

「I'll just check.」

I put away the cloak while standing up. Carla looked up at me while staying sitting down.

I wouldn’t care if it was just a quarrel between villagers or adventurers but, if it was bandit or monster attacking, I couldn’t possible ignore it after hearing the scream.

I recalled Carla mentioning about a village disappearing before we departed. I turned my gaze at her and she smiled softly with half of her face illuminated by fire.

「Aren’t you going to learn to enjoy human blood soon?」

「Don’t group me together with you.」

「My, how mean.」

Carla stood up while putting on her cloak. The smile that she turned toward me deepened happily.

scorched black raw
「I prefer my meat well done rather than rare you know.」

「……I’m going ahead.」

It seemed Carla also felt like going now, but Nero looked like it would keep sleeping, so I went ahead by myself.

I decided the general direction from where the scream came and rushed into the pitch dark forest. Even pitch dark forest wasn’t that different from noon for me who had night vision level 2 that could see the color of magic particle.

The deep forest absorbed sound. But human’s scream could unexpectedly carry far away through forest at night.

「————」

There was another one. I was sure of the direction now. I continued running through the forest in full speed. From the gaps of trees, I could see the valley just like in the map and silhouette of what seemed to be a female getting cornered by male silhouette.

The man lifted up a weapon in his hand that looked like a hatchet.

The woman held her head and screamed. I felt the “unpleasant sign” from that man and switched mentality to combat state.

「──Iron Rose──」

My pink hair that was fluttering in the wind changed color to grayish iron blue like a burning iron. The light remnants that scattered from it formed a trail behind me like a comet while I used the speed that was three times faster than ordinary human to jump over the valley’s cliff that must have been around fifty steps wide.

──*Byuuuu!*

「Go sleep for a while.」

「Gugyah!」

I used my jumping momentum to kick the head of the man who was about to swing down his bloody hatchet. The impact helped reducing my speed.

「……Are you alright?」

I landed on the ground and dispelled Iron Rose while calling out to the woman who was covering her head. That woman whose teeth were clattering noisily looked toward me with a face that was obviously pale even under the faint moonlight.

「H-help……」

「What happened?」

□T-the village……attacked……□

Gasa──

□──AaA……!!□

I heard a sound and voice from behind. The man who I should have defeated just now stood up with his neck still twisted. He ran through thickets and looked toward me with muddy yellow eyes and long fangs.

This overflowing unpleasant presence and smell…….

He wasn't human……this guy-!

□UGAaaAAAAH!□

The thing that was "human" before brandished its hatchet and swung at me. But……

□Gah!?□

If it had human shape then it could be killed.

I parried the coming down hatchet and stepped forward while driving my elbow hard between its eyebrows until it left a dent.

□Ga, AGAaA□

Even so it didn't die. Most likely it couldn't be killed using usual method.

□Undead huh……□

A monster that kept moving even after losing their life. But, even though they were undead, they weren't "immortal". If you didn't fear them then they were no different than any other monster.

I cut the tendon of the man, broke its bone, peeled off its muscle. I dismantled it and swept its leg when it became unbalanced. Then I planted my black dagger until the hilt into its heart when it fell down.

「Ah, ga……」

The weakness of undead was the “magic stone” inside their heart.

Magic stone was dregs of soul that melted into blood and magic particles that gradually hardened into a stone. Master also taught me how skeleton and zombie that didn’t have blood flowing inside their body also had magic stone because polluted magic particle……miasma turned human with magic stone into undead.

This man seemed to be a villager based on his appearance, but it wouldn’t be strange that there was also villager who could use sorcery and had magic stone forming inside their body. But, why was an undead villager appearing in this kind of place?

「……M-miss adventurer?」

The female villager approached me after I destroyed the magic stone in the heart of the undead.

Hyun!

「Hih!?」

「Can you use sorcery?」

I pointed my black knife toward the approaching woman. The man just now was wearing [normal villager attire]. In other words, he wasn’t revived by miasma after he died, it was possible that he got turned into undead while still alive.

The woman who was shaking in fear from looking at the blade that was pointed at her was shaking hard with her teeth clattering noisily……

「Miiisss addveenturrerr!!」

She cried and attacked while baring her long fangs.

I dodged the arm of the woman who tried to grab me with her sharp claws. Then I circled behind her and stabbed her from the side using my black dagger, breaking her neck. Then I slid my knife's blade over that dagger's blade, lopping off the woman's head.

□……□

She was definitely "human" just a moment ago.

But this woman suddenly became "undead" and attacked me.

What was going on over there? It was a fact that a village got attacked. If there was still survivor at the village then I needed to do something in hurry. I focused my eyes and checked the direction toward the village from the snapped branches, then I started running to that direction.

.

I dashed through the dark forest that was illuminated by the hazy moonlight. Then I stopped my legs when I smell blood faintly in the air.

Perhaps because I had gotten close to the village, there were a lot of stumps inside the forest around here. When I turned my eyes toward a part of the forest that had been cleared, I could see a lot of human silhouettes lying on the ground. I guessed that they were villagers who ran out of strength, but I could only see magic particles of darkness from their body.

The magic particles drifting around a living creature were mostly non-elemental, but as long as something was alive, there would be all the other elements contained in there too although only slightly. The magic particle of fire adjusted body temperature, water for blood flow, wind for breathing, earth for bone and flesh, and light magic particle was for life force and dark magic particle was affecting the mind.

These people were already dead. It was easy for dark magic particles to remain in corpse because it was easy for thought to remain until the end, and it also could easily adapt to the dead.

「……u…a…」

One of them groaned and breathed while stirring. It seemed to be a young man at his late teenage. Perhaps he had just gotten of age. He kept lying face down while reaching out with his hand to look for help.

「……」

I stared at that wordlessly. From what my “eyes” could see, I could feel other magic particles than darkness slightly from him, so he must be still in the verge of death.

Perhaps he sensed my presence that was unmoving from my spot, the man extended his arm toward me and lifted up his face. The moment he showed me his eyes, I pulled a knife from my thigh and threw it on the man’s forehead. The knife pierced him.

「Guaaah」

The man jumped on his feet. His eyes that were looking at me looked like animal. I threw more knifes that pierced the man’s eyes, then I tore his throat horizontally with the blade of the slashing pendulum. With that the man finally understood that he was dead and slowly crumpled down.

「You’re merciless even against the “defective”, Aria.」

Carla’s voice teased at me from behind. I glanced at her only for an instant. So she had caught up already.

「……Vampire huh……」

Vampire was famous but they were monster that was rarely seen.

They were well known for their weakness against sunlight that would kill them, how they increased their number by sucking human blood which caused the damage to increase exponentially, but that perception wasn’t accurate.

Not all people would become vampire just from getting their blood sucked. According to master's lesson, human turned into vampire because they lost the strength of soul that was mixed in their blood, and they turned into monster in order to regain their lost soul.

The majority of the victims that got their blood sucked would die normally. Only very small fraction would become vampire. They also had weaknesses like sunlight and the like, but they were still not an opponent that could be underestimated despite that.

Their body's regeneration power was high and they wouldn't die from ordinary wound. With that regenerative power, they wouldn't care even if their muscles got torn and they could move using their maximum physical strength. They were one of the worst type of undead that possessed high physical ability.

Carla called the man [defective] because he was literally a defective vampire.

There were people with large mana capacity even though they never learned sorcery and didn't have magic stone. For example, someone who had learned multiple daily life magic or warrior who had learned body strengthening and Battle Skill which were non-elemental magic.

They wouldn't turn into undead even if they died. But rarely, there was also people with a lot of mana who called low ranked spirit and got possessed to become [Zombie].

Similar like that, some of the victims who got attacked by vampire could also have a lot of mana. Although they couldn't become vampire, their soul would get dirtied and they would be reduced as the vampire's servant while keeping their human appearance.

The defective vampire would seek blood, but their invulnerability wasn't as high as vampire.

They weren't human anymore. Even though they could live under sunlight like living human, their body wasn't alive, they also had lost their

intelligence and sanity from when they were alive. They were nothing more than slave puppet of vampire that was their superior species.

「He might still be “human” you know?」

「Are you going to call something that doesn’t struggle to live a “human”?」

Could something that didn’t live with their own will and attacked their fellow human because of their hatred for the living and thirst for blood be called [human]?

The victim wasn’t at fault. But, there were few ways to save the victim after they had gotten their blood sucked. After all unless they were human with very high stamina value, the only way to save the soul of the victim who had lost the majority of their blood in the countryside like this was only with “death”.

「Your way of living is so “strict” Aria. But, I like those chilling eyes of yours.」

Carla’s white fingertip softly traced my cheek while I was looking at the murdered “victims” with a grim face. I strongly grabbed her slender wrist.

「Carla, what do you know?」

Carla said that she wanted to come along in this trip. When I asked her reason for that, she dodged the question by mentioning that a small village had vanished.

Carla knew “something” that even the black ops didn’t know about. When I asked her that, Carla smiled thinly and turned her gaze toward the direction where the village seemed to be.

「In that case let’s head to the village. I think it will be easier to understand if you see it directly rather than from talking here.」

「……Got it.」

.

Carla and I went through the dark forest side by side. She was able to keep up with my speed even deep inside the forest without getting left behind. Perhaps it was the work of her original sorcery.

A bit of time passed……what seemed to be the fence around the village came into view. We jumped over it and went even further inside. There the smell of blood became stronger and Carla smiled slightly at the corner of my eye.

We saw human corpses here and there the further we went in. I didn't hear any loud sound, so perhaps what happened here was already over, but the number of corpses seemed few for that to be the case.

Even a village in a mountain that didn't even show in the map would still have several hundred populace. If it was just for living then it was possible to do by gathering only several households, but human wouldn't be able to deal with the threat of monster without number. But, the number of corpses that I had found until now didn't even reach a hundred. The remaining villagers should be somewhere else whether alive or dead.

「I can see light over there.」

「Right.」

We saw the light of something like watch fire at a place that seemed to be the center of the village after moving even further.

We ran toward there. What we saw there were dozens of scared villager who were still alive, surrounded by a lot of corpses. All of them were surrounded by "undead" and "defectives".

There were still survivors. And even more dead people. While I was groping for a way to save the villagers who were grouped into one at the center of the village and could only wait for death, a voice that sounded like a bell rang through the night suddenly.

「Who……?」

A pitch black silhouette that was looking toward the villagers asked our identity with word that had odd pronunciation.

That person easily found us out in the darkness even taking into account that Carla who didn't have Stealth skill was with me.

That silhouette slowly turned around. That girl's side profile stood in the dark background from the faint light of the watch fire.

Glossy black skin that was like polished obsidian. Silver hair and long ears. Reddish golden eyes that were reflecting our figure. That person's true identity was……

「……Dark elf.」

「"Evil Race" eh.」

That girl was a dark elf like master. And dark elf was known as [Evil Race] that was hostile against human, forest elf, dwarf, and beastman in this continent.

「*You t*wo……from that *time*」

The dark elf girl's eyes widened slightly when she saw us.

There was very few dark elf who knew us. The duo wearing all black who ran away that time. One of them had traces of burn, while the other one had black skin.

「One of the two who killed Gilgan huh.」

At that time Gilgan said that there were multiple people behind the attack on the crown prince. One of them was this girl……the evil race was involved.

「……H-help!」

「Please, help-!」

The surviving villagers who were gathered up raised their voices with urgency in their tone seeing us suddenly appearing. But in that moment──

「Noisy.」

The girl's right hand was swung without any time for us to stop her. The black iron chain in her hand blew away the head of the man who raised his voice first. The surrounding villagers screamed when his blood and piece of meat showered them.

「──Tsu!」

I was about to rush forward seeing that, but the dark elf swung her chain once more and struck the ground near the villagers. The sound stopped the villagers' scream and my movement.

「*Why*? *Are* you here」

「……You yourself, what is a dark elf doing here?」

「Odd?」

The dark elf girl tilted her head at my question with a clumsy speech. Elf race had long lifespan so surely she wasn't as young as she looked but, for some reason I got the impression that she lacked the worldly sense even more than that.

「Sarara and others, *killing* humans, are natural, *right*?」

「……I see.」

Zasu!

I drew out a throwing knife that was painted black and threw it at the same time when I muttered that. The girl──Sarara's golden right eye was

pierced. It seemed she had the strength of rank 4, but she was full of opening. Perhaps she wasn't used to her weapon.

Sarara's body swayed from the attack.

Za-!

But, Sarara who looked like she was going to crumple down for a moment planted her feet on the ground. She then glared at me with her remaining eye while pulling out the knife from her other eye. Her wound was visibly regenerating.

This girl was an evil race, but that wasn't all.

「……So you're the vampire who attacked the village huh.」

「That's *right.*」

.

▼ Sarara　Race : Dark Elf – Vampire♀ – Assumed Rank 4

「Magic Power : 243/285」「Stamina : 265/265」

「Overall Combat Strength : 940×2 (1880)」

.

Sarara tossed away the bloody knife while affirming my muttering.

She wasn't simply an evil race. Sarara was none other than the vampire who attacked this village.

Even an elf was no different than an ordinary person if they didn't put themselves in battle. Elf could live for a long time but their sense of time was different from human, so their rate of growth was slow.

But, dark elf was feared as evil race because they were considered as enemy by the holy church and so they fought constantly as warrior like master.

I once heard from master that evil race's number was few compared to human race, so in order to increase their number, they accepted even monster with intelligence as citizen. The evil race was already a powerful enemy from the start, but it seemed their side also had no intention to dispatch normal soldiers to enemy country…….

Sarara still looked composed even after appraising Carla and my combat strength. Was it because of her haughtiness as the strong? Her lack of worldly sense and her composure must be also because she had lived far longer than her appearance as an elf girl suggested.

The adventurer girl assigned threat rank 3 to normal vampire, but a vampire that had lived for more than a hundred years would get called greater vampire with threat rank 6.

Even though it didn't feel like Sarara's rank was that high from her atmosphere, it would be better if I considered her combat strength as twice of what I could see if she was a high ranked vampire.

A vampire with combat strength that was nearly 2000. Furthermore I didn't know what kind of trump card the evil race could have.

The leader of our vampire clan, told Sarara and others to increase subo*rdinate*. Sarara will *make* you two be subordinate. Leader, happy.

Bam, Sarara clapped her hands and four villagers who became vampire and ten-odd villagers who became defectives started moving with bloodshot eyes like animal.

The evil race's vampire clan huh……. For people like them to be in this country……perhaps Carla's objective was these guys. I turned my gaze just for an instant toward her and Carla grinned as though to confirm my thought.

I too quickly grabbed my knives and held them in both hands. It would be troublesome to defeat four vampires but, the defectives were just harder to kill. They weren't immortal, they only hadn't noticed that they had died and they would die properly if they were killed.

But there, a young voice rang out from among the surviving villagers.

「Daaaaaaaad! Stopppp!」

A small boy yelled that while crying. A woman who seemed to be her mother hurriedly hugged him in her arms and blocked his mouth.

「……」

So that boy's father was among these vampires or defectives…….

The appearances of the defectives weren't any different from human. But, a servant of vampire was no different than monster. An adult would be able to understand the circumstance in their mind even if their heart couldn't, but a child who lost their parent absolutely wouldn't accept it.

The vampires and defectives attacked. The eyes of the boy who were watching that happening reminded me of my kind father and mother at the back of my mind just for a moment.

But──

GOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

A pillar of flame tore through the night and burned two of the rushing vampires. Only their lower body remained after that and they took several steps forward before crumpling down.

The villagers screamed seeing the things that had the forms of their acquaintances getting burned to death. The vampires and defectives sensed the danger with their instinct and hesitated, while Sarara's eyes widened.

「Are you going to let yourself get killed for that boy's sake? I can kill them in your place you know? They're originally my leftover anyway.」

Carla cheerfully stepped forward with flame and vast mana burning in both her hands.

Those flame and words seemed to remind Sarara of something. Her eyes widened like saucers.

「……*I see.* That flame. Black haired *female* sorcerer……*you* are *I see*!」

Sarara's yell rang out through the night. She looked at Carla with hatred.

「Human *woman*, who betrayed *us,* kill*ed* our comrades!」

「I'm happy that you remember me.」

Carla spoke nonchalantly even toward Sarara's words of resentment.

Most likely Carla had contacted the evil race for the sake of her objective, then they became a hindrance after she finished using them and killed them.

Sarara emitted killing intent while Carla made her flame whirled up. With undead as the opponent, Carla would be able to fight better than me with her ability to control flame. I understood that……but──

「Carla……」

I held back Carla who was going to move forward and stepped in front of Sarara myself.

There was still weakness inside me. Even though I had decided to become strong at heart, that I wouldn't lose at heart even if my technique and strength weren't a match against my opponent, there was still naivety inside me.

My enemy was still "ahead" from here.

I wouldn't stop still until everything was settled.

This was one of them. I turned my gaze just for an instant toward Carla who was giving me an odd consideration before swinging my knife to the side to sever my childish naivety.

「I'll face these guys myself.」

After I declared that, Carla smiled faintly like usual while lightly shrugging her shoulders.

I turned my back toward her and took a step forward while still holding my knives in the ready. The evil race vampire who called herself Sarara turned the focus of her fury from Clara toward me.

「……*Lowly* human, don't get in my *way*」

Bashin! Sarara struck the ground with her black iron chain. With that the vampire and defective villagers suddenly bared their fang like animal as though they had switched mind.

Sarara narrowed her golden eyes in displeasure because she had to take harder rein over her subordinates, exposing her thin and long uneven teeth.

Sarara's golden eyes were still fixed on Carla.

She must be unable to forgive Clara who betrayed them and killed some of their men, but she must also be thinking that a scout and close range fighter like me wasn't any threat against her.

『*You guys, teach* this girl *some* manner! The sorcerer *woman,* kill her painful*ly!*』

「oOOOOOOOOOO!!」

The vampires and defectives let out a war cry by the order of Sarara their master.

First two vampire villagers went forward in order to remove me who was in their way. The boy's voice rang out once more.

「Daaaaaad!」

It seemed that one of them was the boy's father. The instant the boy's voice rang out, the large vampire armed with an axe and looked like a hunter turned his gaze toward the boy.

「D-dad……」

Scared and sad voice slipped out from the boy's mouth. But, that man wasn't human anymore.

The nature of vampire who had been liberated from their reason sought blood of their blood relative because of guilty pleasure. His face wore a twisted smile like an animal.

Human was merely an animal without their reason.

「aAAAAA……!」

His master's order was overwritten by his hunger and desire. He was ready to move toward his own scared son and wife who was protecting him. In that moment──

Zashu!!

「GAAAAAAAAAAA!?」

I leaped forward faster than he could and my dagger stabbed through the man's skull until the inside of his mouth. Fresh blood spurted up.

But, vampire wouldn't perish even when they were killed. The man reached out with his squirming hand even after his head was pierced. I pulled out the dagger while slipping through that hand, then I tore his neck with black knife and stabbed his heart where I felt strong mana with my black dagger.

「……a?」

The vampire father crumpled down without understanding what was happening to him. His transient life expired and he returned to be a mere corpse. The boy who was showered with blood spray stared at his father in a daze……

「Da……d……?」

The boy whose father was killed right in front of his eyes spoke with hoarse voice.

GAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

The next moment, the last vampire and the defectives leaped toward me.

They had no mind even though they were being controlled, that was exactly why small fear could be seen in their eyes that were looking at me who had just slaughtered a vampire in front of a child.

You guys weren't at fault. You all were just pitiful victims.

Even so……you guys were my "enemy".

Gah──

The slashing pendulum's blade horizontally tore the throat of the defective that leaped at me. Then I planted my black dagger between his eyes.

My skirt fluttered while I threw my throwing knives to stab the eyes of the man behind him.

I made full use of my level 4 body strengthening and broke the man's neck with a jump kick. Then I swung my legs midair to rotate while slashing the man's carotid artery with my black knife.

I threw the weight pendulum above my head just before I landed. It drew an arc and swung down at the same time of my landing. The black iron weight smashed the head of a woman who was some distance away.

Even though they had changed into vampire and defective, it just made them harder to kill while there wasn't much change with their combat strength. Lower ranked vampire at best only got stronger by thirty percent. That inability to die easily was really a great threat but, the biggest threat was the living's instinctual fear toward the undead.

But I wasn't scared. It didn't matter if they were undead or whatever, as long as they existed under this world's principle, they would die sooner or

later if I continued to kill them.

Black blade hummed inside the night's darkness and killed the defectives.

Even knowing that these things weren't human anymore, the surviving villagers screamed seeing their acquaintances getting murdered. When I broke the neck bone of the last remaining vampire villager while beheading him with my black knife, the villagers were holding their breath and stopped making any more sound.

***

(……Is that woman really a human?)

She asked that question not because of the matter of strength. Even Sarara who was living as monster instead as human felt abnormal mental strength from that girl who was expressionless slaughtering the defectives that had the appearance of villagers.

She couldn't be underestimated……. Even the minions that she created were getting destroyed in an instant although they were only disposable pawns.

Killing the black haired female sorcerer who used her comrades and killed them was also important, but now she understood that this pink haired woman who was hated by that woman called Tabatha who appeared as an envoy of a new collaborator also wasn't an opponent that she could let her guard down against. Sarara tightened her grip on her black iron chain.

The evil race and human nations had continued to quarrel for hundreds of years until now. There had been no large fighting in the last few decades, but small skirmishes still continued to occur. The evil race was also continuing to secretly maneuver by sending spies to every nation in order to prepare for the next major war.

Human race was weak and short lived compared to evil race, but they had warlike disposition and their number was overwhelming compared to other races.

And even among all the human nations, there were four nations that the evil race couldn't ignore. Those four were Carlfan Empire that was a country of warrior located near the evil race country, United Kingdom of Ganzal that possessed tremendous wealth, Fandora Country where the holy church that was hostile toward the evil race was based on, and then Claydale Kingdom that possessed powerful army and strong national power.

They would be killed if they didn't kill. They could only kill in order to live. Those were the obvious facts in this world where human life was cheap. Those who criticized that were only the ignorant people who had never felt that their life was in danger ever since their birth.

Sarara and others of vampire clan had also to fight in order to live.

The evil race country's population was absolutely few. In there not only dark elf, even people who turned into monster with intelligence like vampire and werewolf got treated as citizen without getting hunted down.

But, it was difficult to completely believe monster that hungered for blood even if said monster was originally a dark elf. And the vampire clan's number was only around 100, too few even compared with the other clans. Because of that they had to continue proving themselves as necessary existence to their comrades the other clans.

That was the reason why only some ten-odd experts got sent to this Claydale Kingdom that was far away from the evil race country.

Looking at it another way, only the vampire clan that could be expected to gain large result even with just a few people could possibly sneak into this country and obtain result.

But vampire couldn't walk under sunlight. Their appearance also differed too much from human so they couldn't approach human settlement. But there were people who came to contact them who were in such state. One of them was that black haired female sorcerer.

The evil race took her offered hand. And then they got horribly betrayed.

It was extremely infuriating to be betrayed like that, but it would be very difficult for them to find one girl in this vast country by themselves.

And so the vampires gave up on taking revenge on the female sorcerer for the moment. Using the information that they received as advance payment, they constructed a base and feeding ground to be used as their foothold in Claydale Kingdom.

One of their schemes, kidnapping the princess failed because it ran in conflict with the noble faction's plan.

But, from the start they had no intention of achieving their plan with other people's help. Sarara who headed out as lookout was also in the middle of making minions in order to move their plan forward with their own hand, where she ran into these two.

These two girls possessed abnormal combat strength. Why were these two appearing in this kind of place? Was there information leak? Was there a traitor?

There was someone else who came into contact with them after the black haired sorcerer betrayed them. The more people who knew about them, the bigger the possibility of information leaking out became, but seeing that only these two were here meant that the information about Sarara and others still hadn't been spread accurately.

In that case, she would deal with these two here. She thought that it was the black haired girl who betrayed and killed her comrades that she should be wary against, but Sarara changed her recognition.

The vampire clan joined hand with Tabatha because they sympathized with her hatred. The target of that hatred was here……she felt bad for Tabatha but, Sarara thought that she should crush this pink haired girl while the black haired girl showed no sign of moving for now.

.

「Woman……say your name*」*

「Aria」

Gakin!

In that instant, with either side not showing any sign of moving beforehand, Sarara's chain attacked like a snake while Aria parried it with her black dagger.

Sarara was a whip user before she became a vampire. She trained her whip's speed and sharpness in order to compensate for her weak strength and reached rank 4. But then the whip's affinity with her vampire ability wasn't good. Seeing that Tabatha told her about the weapon that would be a good fit for her vampiric strength and the way to use it.

Sarara's ear caught the sound of something whistling through the air from the side. Most likely it was the black weapon that was attached at the end of a string that she saw before this. There would be opening created if she didn't dodge that attack. But a vampire had a vampire's way of fighting.

Dashu!

The black iron weight flew in an arc. Sarara blocked it with her left arm. Her flesh burst and her bone broke but, Sarara rushed forward without hesitation and swung her chain.

Aria jumped back to dodge the tip of that chain. Although her combat strength was below Sarara, Aria's speed was slightly faster than her.

Even so Sarara didn't panic. A wound that would take low ranked vampire dozens of seconds to heal would only take several seconds for high ranked vampire to go back to normal. Poison also didn't work to her undead body and it also didn't feel fatigue like the living.

「It's *your* loss, Aria!」

There was no way she would lose the battle even though she lost in speed. Aria's blade didn't move into defense and cut Sarara over and over, but even the wounds from that regenerated in the blink of eye.

(Pointless!)

Sarara thought that while swinging her chain. Aria dodged and slashed at Sarara. But, her single attack became twice, and then each attack became consisting of three slashes. There Sarara noticed the strangeness.

(Aria's slashing speed is increasing!?)

Aria's breathing was getting harder with fatigue appearing on her face. Sweat flew from her skin. The girl who was swinging her blades as though she was dancing looked like she had silver wings made from dregs of light flapping on her back.

Before she realized it Aria was unleashing continuous attacks like surging waves using weapons in both hands. A black knife severed Sarara's tendon and muscle, a black dagger pierced her eye and broke her bone.

「──tsu!?」

Her regeneration couldn't keep up with the injuries. No, that wasn't the case. Sarara was starting to run out of mana from regenerating so many injuries in a short time.

Mana was required for regeneration. She would be killed at this rate. Sarara changed her girl face into animal and rushed forward while discarding her chain in order to slurp Aria's blood and mana.

Even if she received nearly lethal wound, she would be able to kill her opponent first as long as she didn't die. Sarara threw even her pride to the winds and made her last gamble──but.

「Gah!?」

Sarara's knee joint broke when she stepped forward. Her posture crumpled and she fell on her knee.

Sarara had taken too many attacks defenselessly. She noticed that too slow.

Before her eyes Aria pulled her knife behind her with a movement that even looked lax. For the first time since she became a vampire, the word “death” that had never crossed her mind for almost a hundred years surfaced to the forefront.

□──Critical Edge──□

Vampire wasn’t immortal. The only ways to destroy vampire was with sunlight, or destroying the magic stone in their heart……or beheading them.

And then the last thing that Sarara saw the ground beside her eyes, and her own body that had lost its head and spurting black blood.

***

The vampires that attacked the mountain village were exterminated. Why were these guys who were suspected to be involved with the attack to the crown prince were here? What were they trying to do by creating minions here?

Originally I should capture them but, I might be the one who lost here if I didn’t fight with the intent to kill against something like vampire. The culprit was actually a vampire from evil race, but the corpse that could serve as evidence would become ash when morning came and only the magic stone would remain.

Even so, if I brought that magic stone to the adventurer guild to be appraised, it should come to light that the culprit this time was a vampire and an evil race. And then if that magic stone was sold, it would also help with “their” living expenses for the time being…….

Only ten-odd villagers survived.

The acting village chief said that they wouldn’t stay in the village and head to a city where the feudal lord stayed. The number of survivors was few, but that was exactly why they could all ride in carriage to move. They would be able to reach other human settlement before dark.

——*Hyu*

A rock flew at me from behind at that time. I wordlessly slapped it down and turned around. The mother hurriedly restrained the boy who threw rock at me in her arms.

「Why……why did you kill dad-!」

The boy yelled that while her mother hugged him. That pained scream made the other villagers looked down too from the unbearable pain of losing their close people. But……I didn't say any comforting word.

「Because you and I are weak.」

「Wha-……」

I walked toward the speechless boy and looked down on him coldly while continuing to speak.

「I'm weak, so I had no way to save your father other than killing him. You are weak, so your father had to face the vampire in order to protect you and your mother.」

Hearing me talked made the villagers who were hanging down their head to lift their faces and turned their gazes at me.

「Become strong if you don't want to be victim. Your father faced a vampire in order to protect his family right? If you're bitter than become strong enough to kill me. So that you won't lose anything else again.」

「……」

The boy looked down while biting his lower lip. Some of the villagers shut their eyes and averted their gaze from me.

The words that I said to this boy were also directed to myself.

The only way to not lose anything was to be strong. After all you would lose everything and became a corpse if you were weak.

The villagers who finished loading their luggage on the carriage were leaving the village where they were born and raised.

But just before that, several villagers including that boy's mother bowed their head to me. The boy himself never looked back even once and simply stared straight ahead.

And then──.

「Carla.」

「As I thought, being covered with blood really suit you Aria.」

Carla spoke at me who was covered with the enemy's blood and approached me with an intoxicated expression. She used her finger to wipe the blood on my cheek.

「What do you know?」

When I asked her that, Carla smiled like a mischievous kid. The morning wind carried her words away.

.

「You already know right? I am the "culprit" of this incident.」

Castle of Lurking Darkness

……How did things become like this?

Clara was muttering by herself in her room inside the mansion of Dandall House at the sorcery academy.

Recently she rarely went to class using her bad health as excuse. But it was true that she hadn't been feeling well since obtaining Gift in the dungeon and her weight had also decreased slightly.

Her big brother Rockwell thought that his little sister was greatly burdened by her role as the main fiancée of the crown prince. He was worried for her and came to visit everyday, but her fiancée the crown prince had stopped coming to meet her frequently like in the beginning.

Rockwell seemed to be feeling discontent with Ervan's action. He was serving as Ervan's aide inside the academy as the future supreme knight commander, but currently he and his best friend Mihail from Melrose House were gradually distancing themselves from the crown prince faction.

Clara and Ervan had connected emotionally with each other. But, now the distance between their hearts was widening once more.

Who was at fault? Did she do something wrong?

Ervan got attacked on his way to the outdoor field trip and became traumatized.

But Ervan didn't rely on Clara even though as his fiancée she should be the one to comfort his wounded heart. There was also his guilt from not listening to her warning and getting close to other woman, making him trying to overcome his trauma by himself.

But that behavior was like a kid who was scared of getting scolded. That opening in his heart then got taken advantage by the “heroine”.

The otome game’s heroine──Alicia Mercis.

That girl who called herself [Licia] was different in appearance compared to the [otome game heroine] in Clara’s memory, but the girl’s action was strikingly similar with the otome game’s heroine.

But even though her action was similar with the heroine, there was “something” decisively different from her.

All the males who had the role as capture target in the game had darkness enveloping their heart.

The heroine should get inside their heart using that opening and said the words that those males wanted to hear while at times treating them strictly in order to make them grow up, but this girl here was pampering the males by “completely accepting” everything that they sought.

The sicker the male’s heart was, the stronger their dependence to the heroine became. Ervan was at the receiving end of that abnormally pampering acceptance from the heroine. Seeing him like that made Mihail and Rockwell who should also harbor a darkness inside themselves to put some distance from the heroine instead. But as the result of that, the males who got ensnared by that [pampering] ended up staying at the heroine──Licia’s side constantly.

The crown prince Ervan, the royal brother Amor, and then the grandson of the head priest Nathanital whose heart became enveloped in darkness too because of that kidnapping incident. Those three were at the heroine’s side.

Conversely Licia’s butler Seo was now also gradually distancing himself from the heroine because Mihail from Melrose that was the leader of black ops was doing so. Now he was often seen near Mihail and Rockwell.

The ensnared males and the resistant males……”what” was it that differentiate them?

What was the crown prince and the royal brother thinking in their head by putting distance from people of Dandall House and Melrose House that were the biggest supporter of the royal family faction? At this rate the country would be split into two and a new conflict would break out. Such conflict wouldn't just weaken the unifying force of the royal family, but also created a weak spot that other country could take advantage of.

Even if viscount daughters became the first queen for two generations in succession, it would still be possible to put the chaotic kingdom in order if the "heroine" became a [saint] and got acknowledged as Melrose's princess, followed by Ervan growing up to have the caliber of [king].

But, she could only see the worst future in store at the rate things were going.

Clara wondered if perhaps the current heroine was also a reincarnator like Clara, but no matter how she thought about it, the heroines only picked the options that were heading toward bad end, so she scratched out the possibility of the heroine being a reincarnator.

That……the current heroine was just a deviant who was a slave to her desire.

The current heroine──Licia was growing to become even more troublesome than the game heroine. She had to be removed as quickly as possible.

Clara's first plan was to remove the heroine by forcefully activating the major event [Evil Race's Conspiracy] that could happen at the second year.

Originally several flags were needed for [Evil Race's Conspiracy] to happen. It could only happen at second playthrough, when Ervan's positivity level was the highest while the other capture targets' positivity levels were average. It was a route in order to capture the "hidden character".

The heroine would get kidnapped by evil race. In order to rescue her, all the capture targets would head to the evil race country. Then depending on the

hidden character's positivity level, there would be route to reconcile with the evil race or defeat the evil race's king.

But in case they got into a fight with the evil race king, it was possible there would be a bad end where the heroine died in battle because her parameters at that point weren't high enough.

This was exactly why after clearing the dungeon, Clara increased the number of her pawns, contacted the evil race, and provided them with a base and a map so they could kidnap the heroine.

The evil race would collude with a royalty and kidnap the heroine, but nobody would head out to save the heroine because this happened while the positivity levels were still low. With that the heroine would be removed. But, perhaps because of the fault of irregulars like Tabatha and Grave, the evil race joined hand with the noble faction and even plotted to assassinate the crown prince…….

The reality had strayed to be completely different than the scenario. The Ash Crowned Princess was also moving to kill the irregulars Tabatha and Grave.

What would happen to the evil race event because of this……even Clara who had [Foresight] couldn't begin to guess it anymore.

***

「Because, it was me who gave the evil race place to stay in this country.」

「……」

The attack on Elean and Ervan. The people who joined hands with Grave to harm the kingdom……Carla said that it was her who invited them in.

She gave them information to build a base and called them in, and then she betrayed and killed them…….

「……What are you thinking?」

「Nothing. There wasn't any significant reason or anything.」

Carla lightly played stupid like a mischievous girl toward my question. But, dark flame was still burning brightly inside her eyes. I could feel her hatred toward this Claydale Kingdom.

I took Carla's hand that had grown cold and made her faced me. Carla who usually put on a smile that showed no hint of her emotion made a troubled smile in respond.

「You're mean Aria.」

Just like how there was no right way to live, there was also no right way to die.

I guessed that Carla went as far as inviting in the evil race to destroy the kingdom because she wanted to settle things with her own hand.

Carla had her own sense of aesthetic. She was fixated with how she would die. For Carla who had obtained a Gift and wanted to destroy everything by herself now, the evil race people who he invited into this country in the past had become something unnecessary.

「I'll clean up after my toy myself. Aria should kill your own enemy and become stronger……just like me.」

「……」

She smiled in a way as though she was baring her fangs while her purple eyes that were filled with madness pierced me. After that we exchanged no more words and returned to the camp wordlessly.

Carla sought strength in order to die while dragging everything together with her to hell.

I carved the desire to become strong even deeper into my heart, for my own sake……and so that I wouldn't die…….

And to liberate her from her pain.

Even if that ended with the result of taking Carla's life.

.

Several days after that, we arrived at our destination, the territory of Marquis Kendras.

This marquis territory was facing Condo Mine, one of the largest ore deposits in the continent. There were a lot of miners doing physical labor here, and not all of them were human. There were beastmen and rock dwarves mining iron or copper with their excellent physical strength. Dwarf craftsmen with skilful hands created weapon or other handiwork with the mined ore and merchants gathered here for those works. The city was full of vigor.

But we didn't stop by there and headed straight to the city near the border. Just like the city where the northern frontier branch of assassin guild existed in the past, a place with mine would have a large chapel to hold a funeral service for those who died from accident. That place before was a region that being governed by a baron house that had family relationship with Kendras House, but the family lineage was severed around ten years ago and right now the area was under the direct control of Kendras House.

There was a castle there where the baron house once lived in, but now there should be nobody who lived there other than the caretaker. There that man……Grave was staying together with the evil race.

The source of this information had been skillfully covered up, but the black ops who collected the evidence said that they could catch a glimpse of Grave's intent behind the information, maneuvering me to take a certain action.

It was just as Gilgan said, there were multiple motives from multiple people at work behind this case.

Those who wished to remove the crown prince and turn Elena into their puppet.

Those who wished to remove Elena while leaving the crown prince alone.

Those who wished to remove both the crown prince and Elena.

And then those who moved just to take revenge without care of all those things…….

Grave……what is your wish?

.

Then, I shall take my leave here.

Carla's objective wasn't Grave but exterminating the evil race. Just as we decided beforehand, we split into two groups before arriving at the location.

Carla said that she had her own information source but, most likely there was someone else who told her that the evil race's base was in different location that the castle where Grave was staying. But, according to Carla……

A vampire's stronghold obviously will be in the catacomb.

……Apparently.

High ranked vampire should be a formidable enemy even for a Gift owner like Carla. But Carla too surely would never stop still just like me.

Carla had her own fight to take care of. I had my own fight. Our gaze met just for an instant before I turned my back on her without saying anything and started walking toward my battlefield.

This city that once housed tens of thousands of people in the past was said to only have several thousand residences living in it now. Was that decline caused by the disappearance of the feudal lord who governed it or was it because of the vampire lurking in this land…….

The evil race's vampire clan still hadn't make any big movement. Most likely they were still in the middle of increasing their force right now, just like what happened in that mountain village.

Considering that, I felt that my attack timing right now was good but, it was possible that Grave's intention was also at play there.

Even if the vampire clan's main squad was in the catacomb just like Carla said, there was no way there would be none at all inside the castle. I avoided the city and headed to the castle through the forest together with Nero. Then Nero and I started our attack at the same time when the sun rose.

「Gaa……」

<──Forest──Corpse──>

Nero suddenly stopped walking and it transmitted its thought to me through the electricity signal from its whiskers.

「There are "defectives" inside the forest?」

<──Right──>

Most likely the defectives that could move even under sunlight were positioned in the forest as security. I didn't know how many of them there were. Even if they had no combat skill and their combat strength was only around the average soldier, they would surely rush into the castle if a commotion occurred in there.

It wouldn't be hard to deal with them for Dalton and Feld who had large weapon and could use Battle Skill that swept through large area, but my weapons weren't suited to face a large number of opponents.

In that case I should remove the enemies inside the forest first, but if I took my time eliminating the scattered enemies, night would come and the vampires would come out.

<—Advance—>

Then, Nero soundlessly stepped forward in front of me who stood still. It waved its whiskers that extended from its ears like whips toward the direction of the castle.

「……You're telling me to go ahead?」

Nero slightly shook its head when I said that. Its mouth changed shape to form a smile.

「Got it……please.」

「Gaa」

We nodded to each other and parted inside the forest before resuming action once more. Nero too should have resentment toward Grave. But Nero gave priority to me settling things with Grave while volunteering to act as support.

I didn't hesitate. Nero's feeling would go to waste if I took time in making decision.

I erased my presence while sprinting through the forest that was still gloomy in the morning. When I arrived at the castle's stone wall, I threw the scythe pendulum to atop the wall and climbed up from there.

***

All the windows inside the castle were closed. The light from outside was completely blocked by nailing boards over the windows and covering them with curtains afterwards.

The big size of this castle was unsuitable for a baron house. It was originally a relic from when Dandall was still a dukedom. It was a fortress that was built on the border in order to expand human's territory. The walls here were unnaturally thick compared to the present era. The castle was not

only blocking the light but even outside air. I could feel the faint scent of mold and blood inside it.

There was no sign of human life inside. There were only undeads and defectives who weren't even breathing in the castle. Even so there was still a small amount of light inside for the sake of the defectives who couldn't see anything inside complete darkness and the only "human".

A man was sitting alone on an old and rotting sofa in the hall that in the past must be used to gather a lot of people or soldiers. Under the light of candle that was affixed on a candlestand, the man swirled a glass of wine that was red like blood. His left hand that was holding that glass creaked when a woman who was wearing black all over her body appeared from inside the darkness.

「That little girl is here……. Just as promised, I'll be the one to kill her.」

「Do as you please.」

That woman──Tabatha put on a mad smile that was filled with hatred in respond to the man's reply. Then she vanished as though she was melting into darkness.

When her presence had completely vanished, the man leaned back on the sofa and a smile formed on his face for the first time while his artificial left arm crushed the expensive crystal glass in his grasp.

──*Pakin*

「……So you came, Aria.」

***

Under the morning sun, I was climbing the stone wall that made the castle's rampart.

This fortress that was created during the era when the former baron was living here was difficult to invade from the front of from the wall. But,

climbing the wall that had the height of a three-storey building was still easier than opening the huge gate just to pass through.

Even though it was a bit dark because it was early in the morning, there was a possibility of me getting discovered if I ran into “defectives” that could move during daytime.

I didn’t let my guard down even if there was no vampire outside. There were ways to be stealthy at daytime. I perfectly blended my mana with the surrounding magic particles even while climbing the stone wall under the sunlight. I even camouflaged myself with sunlight using light magic particles and blended my figure with the stone wall’s scenery.

I jumped over the wall onto the pathway on the wall and started moving by following the flow of wind. I sneaked behind a defective that was patrolling with a lifeless look, snaked my arm around its neck from the side and twisted to snap it.

□……□

My stealth worked even against this pseudo undead. I had also worked out how much I had to go in order to kill them dead. I judged that as long as I knew that, there would be nobody here who could oppose me under the sun. The strength of the defectives was influenced by their ability while they were still alive, but anyone who had the ability to oppose me should have high possibility to turn into vampire successfully.

After that I spent around one hour to crush the defectives patrolling the courtyard.

But, I got this small feeling that their number should be greater than this. Even if I assumed that it hadn’t been long since the vampires started working to increase their number, if they had reached as far as that remote small village in the mountain to increase their minions then shouldn’t their number be greater than this? Were the majority of them outside? Or perhaps Nero’s appearance caused the undeads inside the castle to also here there?

It was also possible that the majority was concentrated in the catacomb of the chapel Carla went to, but if their combat force was concentrated there, there was also the possibility that it was the work of Grave who had predicted my arrival here and he intentionally arranged for this place to be shorthanded.

……I guessed that was still better compared to him focusing on Elena, but I really had attracted the eyes of a troublesome man even if I said so myself. I had suspected it after encountering Feld and Viro during my childhood, but was I perhaps giving off the smell that was attracting strange men to me? This made me seriously wanted to consider that possibility.

I finished cleaning up the defectives at the courtyard and started climbing the inner wall inside the castle.

I also considered making drastic move like attacking with fire from outside, but it would be troublesome if the citizens saw the smoke and came here, or if the soldiers of the feudal lord who belonged to the noble faction and was an ally of Grave were dispatched.

My fundamental fighting style was assassination. The surest way to make sure Grave didn't run away and die was by killing him myself.

I checked a window at the second floor and saw that it was closed with boards from inside. The inside seemed to be dark. In that case vampire would also be able to move normally there. It would be risky for me to enter inside by breaking the boards. It would cause enemies to gather unnecessarily.

Then what should I do? I considered climbing up the castle and entered inside from a tower that looked like an observation platform.

I climbed my way up using body strengthening and martial art and pendulum's string. On the top I found an entrance on the floor that was covered with a lid. I oiled the hinges so it wouldn't make any sound.

□……Feel……□

I used mana to feel the key's structure, controlled string through the opening and undid the bolt from inside.

I entered inside into what seemed to be a demonic cavern that was ruled by darkness. Even so it wasn't a perfect darkness. There was a small amount of light. I assumed that there were some number of defectives here.

In that case, were the vampires located at the area of perfect darkness?

Also……where was Grave in here?

There was also the possibility of that man becoming a vampire, but I believed that was out of the question.

For me becoming an undead was no different than running away. If he had lost attachment to life then he was just a person of that level. There was nothing to fear from him no matter how strong he was.

But……if Grave was still a human inside this environment, this battle would likely become very deathly like never before.

.

Katsun……

At that time, a footstep resounded inside the darkness.

That footstep sounded like it was made to display the owner's existence. I also stopped walking and saw a flickering candle light approaching this way from the other end of the passage.

From the hard footstep sound, I assumed the person might be wearing high heels like some noble ladies. The person was making their footstep heard because they had absolute confidence with their own strength.

They were definitely vampire. Furthermore they might be high ranked vampire like that Sarara.

The candle light was swaying along with the walking rhythm. Even so the approaching candle's flame itself wasn't flickering at the slightest.

.

▼Female Evil Race　Race : Dark Elf – Vampire ♀ – Assumed Rank 4

□Magic Power□□□□□□□□□Stamina□□□□□□□□

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□×□□□□□□□

.

□Welcome miss. You're the intruder aren't you?□

The dark elf woman had golden hair and silver eyes. Her skin was black like obsidian and she was wearing a crimson dress. Her sharp fangs peeked out from her lips as she smiled.

□A vampire huh.□

□My, have we met somewhere before?□

As expected she seemed to be Sarara's comrade. The vampire woman gave affirmative to my question while approaching nonchalantly without stopping.

□Where is Grave?□

□You're that person's guest? But too bad……□

The vampire woman sighed languidly. The distance between her and me had been reduced until around 20 steps. Even so the vampire woman didn't stop walking.

□Why?□

□You don't know?□

The distance between us decreased until around ten steps. The vampire woman then showed a bright smiling face like a beast.

「I am, feeling a bit puckish right now.」

Hyunn!!

Two “lines” cut through the darkness in that moment. They cut my shoulders as I immediately jumped away. At the same time the scythe pendulum that I threw gouged the woman’s right eye horizontally from the side.

Claang……

「……How horrible. I wonder how many decades it had been since my face got wounded.」

The light vanished when she dropped the candlestick. Black blood spilled out from between the fingers of the woman who was pressing her hand on her face. When she removed her hand, her left eye regenerated as though time was going backward and she regained her former beauty.

「Are you perhaps this country’s black ops knight if you are that person’s acquaintance? You are really strong despite looking so cute. Aa……how fragrant your smell are.」

「……」

She was staring on my blood that was trickling from my shoulder to my fingertip with hunger in her eyes.

「What weapon is that I wonder? I couldn’t see it.」

「Who knows.」

Both sides couldn’t see each other’s weapon. Even so the vampire woman wasn’t tense at all because she was thinking that my weapon wouldn’t be able to kill her.

Vampire was strong. That was exactly why that strength became their weakness.

「My name is Shelaruelu. Remember it okay? I'll let you become my servant if you still alive even after I have my fill.」

There was a flash of blade from the vampire Shelaruelu. So it was her right that was holding the weapon. I guessed that it was a type of one handed weapon, but even my eyes that could see magic particles couldn't determine what it was yet.

The unseen blade carved shallow cuts on my arms and legs. The wounds were shallow because Shelaruelu was also wary against my unseen weapon that she unconsciously stayed in place.

Then I should execute a plan while there was still a leeway for me. For that, I dodged while jumping to the middle of the narrow passage. I kicked on the ceiling while throwing the knives that I pulled out from my thighs.

Clang cling!

「That's pointless.」

The knives got deflected with a flash of Shelaruelu's blade.

It would be pointless if she fought with a vampire's way of fighting like Sarara and let the knives hit her body. But the composed Shelaruelu deflected the knives that weren't any threat for her with her weapon. The sparks from the clash taught me her weapon's true identity.

A fencing type saber huh…….

Even saber that was a type of one-handed sword had several varieties. The warrior at Karlfan Empire that was located in desert didn't wear heavy armor, so crescent moon shaped saber for cutting through leather was common there. Meanwhile the saber at the northern part of the continent was shaped to be thin like needle to specialize in piercing through armor.

Fencing saber was a weapon that was specialized for a duel among them. It was slender and very flexible, a weapon with a single purpose of killing human.

「You should give up soon. The pain will only last for an instant!」

Shelaruelu's eyes were dyed red after smelling the smell of blood. She leaped forward.

The unseen blade hummed through the air. Almost all people wouldn't be able to see the black blade that was made from magic steel inside the darkness when it was swung with a vampire's physical strength.

But, a weapon that was specialized for duel could exhibit its strength only when it was used in accordance to the rule.

「Wha-!?」

I stepped forward at the same time and the blade hit my body. But, that attack didn't cut me apart and only struck like a whip.

A fencing saber was only sharp at the tip. It was just a pointy weapon. Shelaruelu had gotten careless because of her advantageous situation. Even though that weapon was only meaningful when it had distance, she crushed that advantage by closing the distance herself.

I didn't miss that instant and raised my right hand.

But Shelaruelu who shouldn't be in the position to dodge smiled at that moment──I swung down the weight type pendulum while slashing at the darkness behind me with the knife in my left hand.

「GYAAAAAAAAAAAH!」

Two screams echoed through the darkness. Even the undying vampire would stop their activity when their brain was destroyed.

「……You bi……tch!」

Shelaruelu was still moving even with half her head crushed. She glared at me with her remaining right eye as I raised my right arm once more. I swung down the weight pendulum once more on her face that was twitching with fear.

.

”Ash Crowned”……!

So the “ambusher” is really you……Tabatha.

When I turned around, I found Tabatha wearing all black kneeling on the floor. Her face had been torn apart along with her mask.

The way to use a weapon would change depending on what it was used for. There was no idiot who wouldn’t be on their guard inside this kind of darkness that was perfect for assassination.

How, did you notice……

Who knows.

The way she erased her presence was perfect. Even I didn’t detect her. But, there was no way I wouldn’t notice when they wounds that I got were much more than the number of slashes Shelaruelu launched. Besides from her way of speaking, I felt that she had clearly learned about me from someone else.

In that case I could see the enemy’s identity based on the situation. That was why I was convinced that “Tabatha” was the unseen attacker and I simply slashed at the position where it was easy for her to attack.

And it was Shelaruelu taught me the timing of her attack.

Don’t make light of me……YOU SHITTY BRAAAAATTTT!

Tabatha who was kneeling jumped to her feet and assaulted me.

The black dagger that I threw in that moment stabbed her right eye. Even so Tabatha didn't stop and swung down a mythril chain while sporting a twisted smile.

「It's the end, Ash Crownedd!!」

Really……the strong people in this world were too careless.

In that moment, the "scythe" pendulum flew from her blindspot and tore until halfway into Tabatha's throat.

Tabatha had also transformed into vampire, perhaps because of her grudge for me, or to heal the burns all over her body.

Tabatha must have planned to take me by surprise by hiding that fact. She was pressing her hand on her neck was also to hide her healing wound. It was impressive that she threw away her humanity just because of her grudge toward me.

But, my eyes that could see magic particle could differentiate whether someone was human or not.

Even without that, it would be obvious seeing that the burn scar I saw on her in that forest had now vanished.

「……aguoaaa」

Even though she didn't die instantly, her neck had just gotten slashed deeply until it almost came off. She pressed her hand on her neck while vomiting blood and reaching out toward me with her black claws.

Perhaps you would be able to kill me if you continued attacking during the surprise attack before this. But, you couldn't right? After all a freshly made low class vampire didn't have that much regeneration ability.

「It's good that I can meet you again Tabatha.」

Her eyes were reflecting my figure that was swinging down a pendulum just like before with Shelaruelu.

It'll be troublesome later unless I kill you with my own hands.

Splat…..

.

After that I beheaded Tabatha and Shelaruelu to finish them off with certainty. Then I treated my wounds before moving once more.

There was no point to stay hidden anymore. Because my fight with Shelaruelu had caused the vampires and defectives inside the castle to gather. Even so there was no dark elf among the vampires who attacked me. None of them was also as strong as Shelaruelu or Sarara.

I used pendulums as trap to finish off the vampires that came out. I kept moving while defeating the enemies and arrived at the great hall that was the gathering place for the fortress's soldiers. It was as though I was guided to here.

When I opened the door, There was only one table and one candlestick inside. A single man wearing loose black outfit stood up relaxedly.

His presence had gotten deeper than the last time we met. The thickness of his body had also increased compared to before.

The left arm that he lost to Nero was replaced with an artificial arm made from magic iron in the form of a gauntlet. His eyes narrowed for an instant seeing me coming and the corner of his lips rose slightly.

It's wonderful that you're here, Aria.

□Grave……□

The genuine monster who was haunting this country had gotten even stronger and showed himself in front of me once more.

.

▼Grave　Race: Human ♂ – Rank 5

□Magic Power□□□□□□□□□△30UP　□Stamina□□□□□□□□□△60UP

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□□□With Body Strengthening□□□□□□□△600UP

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□GYAAAAAAAAAAH!?□

Several vampires of evil race were burn to ash with the flame that looked like a fire dragon together with their defectives.

□……You are,,,,, the “traitor” sorcerer!!□

Those eyes and words that were filled with hatred made Carla smiled more cheerfully than usual in the middle of blazing flame.

□I wonder if this is all of the trashes!?□

□Damn you!!□

That evil race vampire──Gostoura raised his voice in fury in respond to Carla’s joking words.

Gostoura told his close friend, the clan head *Leave it to me* when he was given the assignment to infiltrate into this Claydale Kingdom, a country that was very far away from the evil race country together with only ten-odd

comrades so that the vampire clan could be recognized by the others as a part of the evil race.

Their objective was to kill the royal family of Claydale.

But, the scheme that was to be their first objective was changed due to the advice of Grave who became their collaborator in this country.

It was a very long term plan that would astonish any human if they heard it, but dark elf that was a part of evil race had a lifespan in the range of several hundred years, while vampire race's lifespan was even longer than that it could even be called an eternity.

The time to carry out that plan had come and they went as far as braving danger in order to increase the number of their sacrificial pawns.

But, the pawns that they had created with much effort was now reduced to ash inside the flame. Inside the burning catacomb, Gostoura's gray eyes glared at the first person who called them here, and also the person who betrayed them, the sworn enemy who killed his comrades.

「Traitor? We were just using each other from the start. Am I wrong?」

When Carla was still ten years old, she learned about the existence of them the evil race and drew them into this kingdom.

She talked to them about her grudge to the kingdom and used a detailed map of the kingdom as bait to come into contact with them. Then when several vampires showed up in front of her, she killed them in order to promote her own growth in strength.

「I had no more use of you guys. It wouldn't problem me at all even if you guys were gone, but it's also not amusing to see someone else making use of my throwaway without even asking.」

「You're calling us……your throwaway」

The handsome face that was unique to dark elf twisted like a beast. Gostoura bared his fangs. The hatred of the surrounding vampires dyed even the flame black, and yet the smile on Carla's face didn't waver.

「I wonder who else contacted you guys other than me? Is it the black ops' traitor? Or a naïve young lady perhaps? Well, not like it really matter.」

Carla brushed up her abundant black hair with one hand leisurely. A tall and lean vampire saw that movement as an opening and attacked like a gust of wind.

「──Stone Lance──」

「GUGYAAAAAAAAAAH!」

A lance of stone extended from the ground like an ice pillar and pierced that vampire's chest without Carla chanting anything to cast it. The vampire was hanging in the air like a butcher-bird prey impaled on twigs. He was struggling in agony while Carla didn't even look at him and put on a dark smile that was filled with madness.

「I wonder, do all of you still thinking that you are a needed existence for someone else?」

──Mr. Sacrificial Pawn──

「……Kill her!」

Gostoura guessed the meaning of Carla's words that ridiculed even herself as a sacrificial pawn. His order made the vampires and several hundred defectives to attack Carla all at once──.

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「──Soul Thorn──」

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Black thorns entwined on Carla's pale white skin like tattoo. They writhed as though to devour her life.

The power was unleashed and immense mana whirled out from all over Carla's body like a storm. The defectives that were surging forward like a tsunami were pushed back while Carla's body was pushed up to the air.

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▼Carla Lester　Race□Human♀□Rank □

□Magic Power□∞□□□□□△20UP□Stamina□33□53□△1UP

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□□□Special Combat Strength□□□□□□□
△39UP

□Gift□Soul Thorn　Exchange/Life Time□

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□Taake this! Fire Ball──□

Level 5 fire sorcery, Fire Ball was created in the air when Carla waved her hand. Five of them.

Sorcerer could only use sorcery of the same rank and lower because using sorcery that surpassed the level of the magic power control would require mana cost several times than the usual. Sorcery level 4 was the best that Carla could do, but the vast mana that was produced by Soul Thorn enabled her to use sorcery that was two level higher than her level.

The five fire balls exploded in the middle of the defectives that had gotten pushed back by the wave of mana and unable to move.

That explosion could even stop rank 6 monster. Just five of them swallowed more than a hundred defectives in flame. But, the defectives that only got blown away by the shockwave immediately stood up, while the vampires

who had high parameters also leaped out from inside the flame and assaulted Carla.

Carla's stamina was just at the level of a child. Let alone the attack of a vampire, even an attack from a defective could kill her instantly if it hit her fully. But──.

「Gah!?」

Carla who was floating in the air dodged an attack from a vampire that jumped toward her, then she kneed him on the face. Even so the vampire kept attacking, but Carla parried it with her arm, then crushed his eye with a thrust of her hand. She toyed with him using her martial art.

Carla's physical ability wasn't excellent. Her <Martial Art> Skill was level 3, and even her thinking speed could only reach level 4 at best even when she had forcefully sped it up with her magic power control. With Carla's original parameters, her thinking speed might still be reasonable, but there should be no way for her to parry a vampire's attack with martial art.

But, the black thorn that was emerging on her skin because of Soul Thorn wasn't simply entwining around Carla. It could move Carla's body just as she wished like a string puppet.

「──Stone Shot──!」

「──Splash──!」

「──Fire Arrow──!」

Several attack sorceries were fired from the vampires. At the same time the surviving defectives also rushed toward Carla once more.

They would attack using their number if they couldn't match her in sorcery ability and power. It was a simple number game using low ranked vampires that only had number going for them, but this tactic should be highly effective considering Carla's stamina parameter.

□──Typhoon──□

But in that moment, a level 5 wind sorcery swept over the area. It blew away the approaching attack sorceries along with the low ranked vampires.

Wind sorcery Typhoon should be a sorcery that exploded for an instant to blow away the targets using the wind blast, but Carla's right hand maintained Typhoon using her immense mana while turning her left hand toward the low ranked vampires and defectives who couldn't move.

□──Fire Breath──□

Carla's specialty, the level 4 fire magic, Fire Breath's flame spread out in wave. The defectives couldn't even let out their death throes and crumbled into ash.

□UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!□

Inside the hellfire, even further above Carla who was floating in the air, Gostoura swung down his sword from the catacomb's ceiling that was higher than five meter above ground.

□──Ice Lance──□

Carla immediately fired a magic to intercept. But at that timing, black blood spurted out from Gostoura's back and formed warped black wings to float in the air. With that he dodged Carla's ice spear.

The black wings wasn't an ability of vampire, but darkness magic that was passed down in vampire clan where the user was using their own blood as medium. Gostoura dodged Carla's attack with that power and swung his sword powerfully toward Carla.

Clang!

Carla immediately tried to block that full powered swing with her short sword, but it broke. Even so it allowed Carla to get away from being killed. However it also created a large opening in Carla's posture.

「This is the end for you!」

Seeing that great opportunity, Gostoura took the stance to execute a Battle Skill in order to let out the greatest attack.

The broken sword blade twirled slowly in the air within his accelerated mind. He would definitely be able to kill her in this distance──Gostoura thought as she kept his eyes fixed on Carla, but then an indescribable chill ran through his back.

「──Fire Arrow──」

Carla fired a level 1 fire sorcery. But, even though flame was a vampire's weakness, a low ranked sorcery like that wouldn't be able to stop Gostoura at this point.

「What-!?」

But with just that single chant, Carla crated more than a hundred fire arrows that completely filled the area.

「Curse youuuu!」

Even Gostoura couldn't dodge all the fire arrows that were raining down on him. He deflected the one that would hit him with his arm. But, just that single fire arrow instantly carbonized Gostoura's arm.

「GUOAAAAAAAAAAH!?」

「Gostoura-samaaa!」

A female vampire stepped forward to protect Gostoura, but more than ten fire arrows burned her into ash. The other low ranked vampires who were Gostoura's subordinates also threw themselves to the firing line one after another. They managed to protect Gostoura by becoming shield……but.

「Where are you going……?」

The vampires who were concentrating to dodge the fire arrows didn't notice Carla's approach. Carla grabbed Gostoura's right arm that was starting to regenerate and easily tore it off with the black thorn's strengthening.

「Curse you, curse youuuuuuuu!!」

Gostoura who was protected by the surviving vampires backed away. Carla too landed on the ground and played with the bloody black arm.

The defectives that numbered in the hundreds were also reduced into ash inside the flame. There were only four vampires remaining even including Gostoura.

Even though it was by someone who possessed a combat oriented Gift, they were being trampled just by a single girl, they the vampires who should be the monsters here. They were looking toward Carla as though she was a monster.

「It should be time already I think……」

「What?」

Gostoura who was holding his arm asked back in respond to Carla's muttering.

But Carla didn't respond and looked over the catacomb that was starting to be enveloped in flame. She then said words that they couldn't believe.

「This place also won't last long. You guys can leave already.」

「What're you planning……!」

Carla said that she would let the vampires get away even after doing this much. Gostoura couldn't understand her intention from those excessively egoistical words and asked her back. Carla grinned and lightly waved her hand.

I told you guys before right? I have grudge against the kingdom. …… Right right, the “greatest combat force” who was protecting the princess also came to this area with me. You can join hands with that man to defeat her, or you can attack the lightly defended academy……do as you like.

Gostoura glared at Carla to ascertain her true intention after he heard those words.

Just what was it she really wanted to do here? Rage bubbled up inside him because of the girl’s too incomprehensible action, but Gostoura saw the disadvantageous situation and decided to retreat.

I have no grudge toward the evil race from the start. Come on, you guys will get buried here if you don’t hurry you know?

……You better remember this.

Gostoura spat out those parting words and vanished into darkness together with his subordinates.

.

……

Carla quietly saw them off until their presence completely vanished. Then her cheerful smile crumbled into intoxicated madness. She let out a heated sigh in the middle of the ocean of flame.

Aa, Aria……

Carla accompanied Aria not to deal with evil race that had left her grasp. Her true objective was to reduce the evil race into moderate number that she could send toward Aria’s way, pulling her into endless battlefield.

The evil race was nothing more than one of the numerous schemes that Carla was cooking up. From the start Carla was giving no heed at all whether they were leaving her control or getting killed off on their own.

Her hatred toward this country was still there inside her. But after running into [her], her hatred, her anger, her schemes, all of them now had lower priority than her.

That girl's existence was something shocking to her when she first met her.

Even adults were scared of her and always be mindful of her mood, but that girl who was the same age like her faced her head on.

That girl was the only one. Carla was living inside pitch black darkness, walking on top of a blade called "madness" that was hurting both herself and others with bare foot. But that girl, she was the only one who was standing on the same place with her.

That girl's eyes were always looking ahead at far away. But surely Carla didn't exist at the end of her gaze.

Carla wanted to make herself become reflected on that girl's eyes even if just for an instant. Because of that she hurt herself to cover that girl with all the blood from her wound.

Blood really looked good on that girl. Whether it was that girl's blood or Carla's own blood…….

The figure of Aria soaked in their bloods while killing her looked beautiful even in Carla's imagination.

Carla's fingertips that were soaked in black blood pressed on her cheeks that felt like they were going to broke into laughter. Her expression than changed to look like a maiden in love in the middle of the sea of flame.

Those beaten up vampires would surely rely on their new collaborator. And Aria would definitely be there in whatever they tried to do then. It was impossible for her to be killed by anyone else than her. And it was also impossible for her to be killed by anyone else than Aria.

She would destroy this country that had driven her mad. And then Aria would definitely fight Carla if she started slaughtering the nobles that

gathered in the palace.

The blood soaked kingdom would be necessary to be the [stage] where that last act would be played on.

But if Aria stayed like she was right now, some hindrances would surely appear and interrupt the deathly duel that should be just for the two of them.

Bathing in the blood of the evil race would surely make Aria even stronger. And then in the gorgeous stage where a lot of nobles gathered, Aria and Carla would kill each other in the middle of sea of blood of dead nobles.

.

Aria. Become stronger quickly……then come kill me.

Mortal Combat VS Grave

Grave's strength had increased even more compared to the last time I saw him.

Judging from the pressure that I could feel on my skin, he had surpassed a fellow rank 5 like Feld and approaching the level of people like Dalton or master.

「……You didn't heal that left arm?」

Grave was waiting for me alone inside a vast room made of stone. When I asked him that, he raised his eyebrow slightly and moved his fingers while making artificial arm that was made from magic iron to creak to show it off.

「It would be a waste of time spending half a year or a year to regenerate my arm. You also think so right, Aria?」

「……True.」

We exchanged a light talk. I finished gathering the minimum information from conversation and stepped forward soundlessly. In contrast Grave started walking while making loud footstep intentionally.

「Now Aria, let me see your "way of life".」

——*Dan!*

Grave and I kicked on the floor at the same time and leaped forward. We crossed each other midair.

I kicked on the air to move midair and dodged the sword that Grave swung with his flesh and blood arm. Even so I was unable to dodge it fully and a

shallow cut was left on my shoulder.

Before Grave was using two swords. But why didn't he use his left arm this time?

Was it because he couldn't move his artificial arm well? ……No. That was because his left arm didn't need "weapon" anymore.

Inside the world where only my thought was accelerating while both us were midair, Grave slowly turned his left arm toward me.

「Tsu!」

That bad premonition made me rotated the slashing pendulum that I left behind when leaping forward. The slash that came from the side was deflected by Grave with his artificial arm. I landed on the ground and took a distance from him once more.

「You're being really careful. Where is your favorite poison? Show me your whole strength.」

「……」

It was dangerous to fight an opponent who possessed an unknown trump card head on. Even so there was something that I learned from this short exchange. That magic iron arm was largely the reason of the increase in Grave's combat strength.

Artificial limb wasn't developed well in this world. Usually people would cure their loss of limb with Cure sorcery if they had a certain degree of wealth. Only those who didn't have the money for six months long treatment chose to wear artificial limb.

But Grave's artificial arm could move, even until the fingers. Originally the quality of equipment didn't affect the combat strength in appraisal, but judging from the magic particles that my eyes were seeing, that artificial arm must be a very high performance magic tool. It even surpassed his

original arm in hardness and strength. Most likely it contained some kind of gimmick just like my boots.

Observe it, then expose its ability. I could rival Grave only in speed and observational ability that I had trained.

「I'll come to you if you won't come!」

Grave repositioned the one-handed sword in his right hand and leaped forward. I too immediately swept aside my skirt and pulled out knife from thigh and threw it, but Grave struck it down with his left artificial arm without slowing down.

「──Dark Mist──」

「Useless!」

The mist of darkness that I casted was swept away with a swing of his artificial arm. From the start my magic wouldn't have any great effect to Grave, but it seemed that artificial arm had the effect of dispersing mana to some degree like his previous magic sword.

「HAAAH!」

Dogon!!

I dodged. At the same time the sword that Grave swung broke the stone floor.

「What's wrong Aria……have you only trained to run around!」

Grave repeatedly spoke obvious provocations.

Grave who was originally a light warrior type had switched to become a pure warrior type. He often got thought as a scout based on his responsibility in black ops, but originally his fundamentally fighting style was as a [warrior].

My fighting style wasn’t suited to get into head-on sword exchange against a knight. But, I had my own way of fighting even against a knight.

【──Shadow Snatch──】

【Nu!】

Grave raised his guard against my original dark magic. This guy was there when I used it against Nero, but he shouldn’t know about its effect too. But Grave cut down the darkness around him with his sword before stepping forward without hesitation.

I’m using my trump card that Grave didn’t know about effectively. I couldn’t waste even a single move. Grave’s sword clashed with my black blade. Sparks scattered while my light weight body got sent flying to the air.

Grave pulled his sword far behind his back in that moment.

【──Vorpal Blade──】

A level 5 Battle Skill that unleashed five consecutive attacks instantly attacked me.

But I was aiming for that moment. I fired the crossbow that I took out from my Storage. The arrow got absorbed into the shadow of my skirt and attacked Grave from right below him.

【Guh!】

Grave dodged it just barely. But the Battle Skill he executed didn’t stop. But with the Battle Skill’s timing shifted even for just a moment, even if other people wouldn’t be able to dodge it, I had this.

.

【──Iron Rose──】

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▼Aria 【Alicia】　Race【Human ♀】Rank 【

【Magic Power【【【【【【【【【【Stamina【【【【【【【【【

【Overall Combat Strength【【【【【【With Special Body Strengthening【【【【【【【

【Battle Skill】Iron Rose/ Limit 232 Second】

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My hair changed color into grey iron blue like a burning iron. Residues of light scattered. I dodged the slashes with a movement that made my body groaned while my thinking speed doubled up. Without stopping I kicked on the ceiling and slashed at Grave's neck like a shooting arrow.

【OOOOOOO!?】

Grave let out an astonished yell. His eyes I made the light residues flapped like wings and held my blade in ready while approaching expressionlessly. My figure was reflected on his wide open eyes.

Grave couldn't move because he had just executed a Battle Skill. But──

【Tsu!?】

His artificial left arm alone was moving unnaturally. Its armoring opened and "something" shot out to cut me.

【Kuh!】

I immediately twisted my body and avoided a lethal wound, even so I got several places cut up and I rolled on the ground while bleeding. Even so I immediately raised my knife and saw Grave staring at me with a warped smile.

【So that's your true power, Aria-!】

「……」

The wounds from the slashes themselves weren't deep. But my stamina would run out first if I kept bleeding like this.

What was that attack just now? Was it the gimmick installed in that arm? I glared warily at that arm like a beast, but Grave didn't continue attacking and held out his hand toward me.

「You're interesting just as I thought. If it's you then surely you will be able to understand my conviction and become the shield and blade to protect this country. I'll say this one more time, Aria……take my hand!」

Grave saw me as a fellow "mad dog" like himself. That was why he was targeting me, and if I had the conviction that allowed me to survive even then, he was thinking that it would be natural for me to join hands with him.

「I refuse.」

Even so my answer had been decided. I'm your enemy. Certainly we might be similar in some parts. Even so, I had no "sympathy" for you.

Grave heard my words that were filled with that feeling. His eyes glared at me for just a moment and he pointed the sword in his hand toward me.

「……Very well. If that's your will, proof it to me then, Aria. Try stopping me if you think you can stop me with your conviction!」

「……I don't need you telling me that.」

I took a deep breath while also inhaling magic particles. I dyed my mana that was strengthened by Iron Rose with the magic stone in my heart, and stopped my blood from flowing out from my wounds.

「I'll have you show me your seriousness. I see that technique has a time limit. Can you dodge my "string" in that state?」

String……? String huh! The moment I realized that, the artificial arm's armoring opened once more and something unseen flew out.

「Tsu!」

I jumped to evade using only my instinct. Even so I couldn't fully dodge the attack and my shoulders and arms got cut. But my blood showed the attack's true shape just for a moment.

「……Sharp string huh.」

「Exactly. I investigated the weapon you used and learned <String Control> myself. This thing is called steel blade string and not something that can be handled with your bare hand, but it's possible using this artificial arm.」

「……」

Steel blade string……I think I once heard from master that it was a weapon that an assassin clan of the evil race was using.

It seemed that it couldn't be used without a special technology but, Grave obtained it from the evil race and he could use it by installing it in his artificial arm. This was a weapon that was specialized for assassination and it wouldn't be that much of a threat against an opponent that was wearing armor, but this was Grave's trump card against me who wasn't wearing armor.

How should I see through it? I was forming a countermeasure inside my head while getting into a glaring match with Grave, then I suddenly heard a sound from far away. Grave frowned.

「A nuisance is coming huh.」

Bam!

「Grave!!」

The door at the back opened and four vampires with scorched clothes rushed in. Grave knitted his eyebrows seeing the condition of the man at the forefront.

「……Gostoura. Why are you and your men in such state?」

「Gu……, we were attacked……by that traitorous sorcerer」

「Hoo……for you and your men of all people to receive such serious blow」

Grave muttered with an unamused look. His focus turned toward me just for a moment.

Was it Carla who did that? It wasn't like Carla to slip up like this, but it was also just like her. Grave understood the true identity of the attacker from that expression that I made for a moment. He suddenly treated the vampires with a friendly attitude.

「Then this is convenient. This girl right here is the greatest obstacle of your plan that I mentioned before. If someone so skilled that can reduce you guys into this state is also here, that means there is nobody who can stop you guys at the target place. Isn't that right?」

「……」

The evil race vampire called Gostoura seemed to understand something from Grave's words. He nodded with a look of determination.

「……Yeah. We can leave her to you right, Grave?」

「That's fine with me. I shall promise to take the task of holding back the one who attacked you guys in this place too.」

「……I'm counting on you.」

I got a bad premonition. The evil race's plan? And I was a hindrance for that? I started moving based on that hunch to stop the vampires, but the steel string shot out toward me from Grave once more.

「Tsu!」

「Are you forgetting that I'm your opponent?」

Seeing Grave holding me back, Gostoura who was looking at me with displeasure let behind some words for harassment at the end before leaving.

「Grave. The wish of us and yours will come true with this. Just as promised, we will definitely take back the princess with us to our country.」

「Wha-……」

Princess? Elena was going to be taken to the evil race's country? I turned my glare from the evil race that vanished into the darkness toward Grave. The guy then started talking with a disinterested look.

「It's a long term plan of those guys who have lifespan of hundreds of years. They're going to remove the capable princess and put the incompetent crown prince on the throne. And then after dozens of years passed, the national strength of this Claydale that's in the way of the evil race will surely decline, but it's not a problem. At that time I can just kill all the rotten apples while leaving the capable subordinates alone. You should learn from this. What a nation need is not a single wise king, but a suitable puppet for the wisemen.」

Certainly the possibility was high that the situation would turn to be like that with how the crown prince was right now. Even if the country became roughened up because of that, Grave was thinking that would still be better compared to if the country fell into chaos because of a conflict for the throne with Elena.

And then, even if the king was incompetent, there would be nothing wrong with that if there were capable subordinates to wield authority in his place. That was Grave's declaration.

「The evil race was also panicking when the noble faction arbitrarily tried to kill the crown prince. Though thankfully you saved the crown prince.」

「What are they planning with Elena-」

「They will keep her alive. After all her bloodline might become necessary when the time come for a change of king. And she can also become hostage if it prove necessary, so the evil race too won't treat her too badly. …… Now, what're you going to do Aria? Without you at the princess's side, there's nobody in that completely relaxed academy who can stop the evil race you know?」

「……」

I guessed, that their chance of success should be low. The vampires should also think the same. That was why they were increasing the number of minions that they could use.

But, the vampires who escaped Carla had received a serious blow and driven into corner. Because of that they chose to use a forceful measure of attacking the academy while Carla and I weren't there.

「Come, show me the you when fighting seriously. You can only kill me and chase after them if you want to protect the princess.」

There were guards in the academy, and there were also the royal guards protecting the royalties there. It would be difficult for evil race that had different appearance from human to even arrive at the academy. But, if in the worst case they managed to enter into the academy, the average knights and soldiers wouldn't be able to stop them.

Even if I wanted to chase after them, it would be necessary to defeat Grave who was holding me back as quickly as possible. But I was still unable to see through his steel string that was stopping me in place.

「……Got it.」

You told me to get serious didn't you, Grave. I had already resolved myself since a long time ago. I had kept fighting until now in order to settle things with you but, if this was what you were doing, I would stop "fighting" you anymore.

「I'll get "serious" solely just to "kill" you.」

「Interesting……well then, let me see this so called seriousness of yours!」

Was he enjoying fighting me when I was serious? Or perhaps he was just that confident of himself? Either way the corner of Grave's mouth rose slightly hearing my words.

I dispelled Iron Rose and took out two porcelain bottles from the pouch on my waist. I suddenly threw one of them on Grave's legs.

「Nu?」

Grave jumped back at the same time when I threw the bottle. The porcelain bottle broke when it hit the floor and some gooey liquid spread out.

「……What are you doing, Aria.」

「……」

I had even stopped using my trump card Iron Rose and dumped light green liquid on the floor. It wasn't water or even oil and it gave off no smell. It made Grave looked puzzled.

I didn't answer that question and threw the other porcelain bottle on that liquid. The second bottle broke and the liquid that spilled out from there mixed with the first liquid. Then they started emitting a strange smell.

「This is……!」

Grave instantly noticed that it was [poison]. He covered his mouth and jumped even further back.

「Aria, you-」

「Grave……. I told you already that I'm getting to "kill" you.」

The thing that I used was the [corrosive poison] that I slathered on my arrow when sniping the orc soldier.

I mixed two different liquids that transformed into a deadly poison. Even a rank 4 orc soldier died instantly just from the small amount of it that I smeared on an arrow tip.

I kept it separate as two different liquids before because it would start evaporating the instant they got mixed. Even that vapor would become poison that gnawed on human body. The smell was horrible so when it was used inside a room, the target would notice and run away, but there would be no problem in this situation.

When mixing this poison, even when doing it slowly by mixing the liquids drip by drip required the mixer to cover their mouth with cloth and did the procedure with meticulous care so that the effect to their body could be kept at minimum. But, if the whole liquids got mixed into poison all at once──

「Even a room this big will get filled with poison gas in several minutes. I know the poison's composition, have poison resistance, and am covering my mouth with a muffler that has been soaked in the antidote, even then I'll still die in half an hour. I wonder how long you will be able to endure it? With how wary you look, the poison is not ineffective against you isn't it?」

「……」

Grave stayed quiet and glared at me with a sharp gaze to ascertain my real intention.

I faced him while he was like that and pointed back over my shoulder.

「The exit is over there. Defeat me if you want to survive. Your lungs will rot even if you kill me if you take your sweet time you know?」

Inside the dark room, only the sound of the corrosive poison eroding the stone floor could be heard. In such battlefield, Grave tied a towel over his mouth and quietly raised his one-handed sword.

「You are mad……. So your "seriousness" is not your strength or even your technique, but that mentality huh.」

「Don’t group me together with you and that girl.」

Grave knitted his eyebrows for an instant when I hinted at the existence of one other person.

Now, let’s bring this to an end.

Clang!

We kicked on the floor at the same time and closed the distance in an instant while avoiding the poisonous smoke. My black dagger and Grave’s sword produced sparks.

I was the one getting pushed back because of the difference in skill level and physical size. Even so I didn’t lose my balance and flipped in the air like an acrobat while throwing a knife. Grave who was about to continue attacking me stopped in place for a moment from that.

There were half an hour until I died. And if I fought with all my effort, perhaps my state would reach critical level in half that time.

Grave should understand that too. If he let me get away, I would heal myself using Treat and came to kill Grave once more while he was still poisoned. Even if Grave ran away, I would catch up in my treated state compared to his poisoned state and finished him off without fail.

In order to survive, he mustn’t give me any time to use Treat and kill me without fail in this place.

「……tsk」

Grave too judged that he would just waste time to have a clash of blade with me. He grimaced and opened a distance with me, then he turned his artificial arm toward me and opened the armoring.

「It looks like I have been overestimating you, Aria. No matter how strong you have become, you have allowed yourself to be reduced into a dog of the royal family who doesn’t hesitate to die here together with me. In the end

you’re just a stray dog. You’re unable to reach the place where I’m standing huh……

The unseen blade, steel blade string was let loose from the artificial arm’s gimmick.

──Shield──

This sorcery shield was originally intended to block sorcery itself, but it also had slight defensive power against physical attack like a glass.

Praang!

Kuh

I heard the hallucinatory sound of the magic shield breaking. The steel shield reacted with the magic shield’s mana and struck my arms and legs. But, there was also something that I found out from using magic shield even though I had to dispel Iron Rose for it.

The steel string wasn’t as flexible as my spider string. The string control skill also could control it only within a limited degree. It could be shot out with high speed despite not having any weight attached on it like my pendulum because the steel string was coiled like a spring. I couldn’t be fired unless it was compressed like that. And then from blocking it with the magic shield, I had also grasped the amount of mana covering the steel string.

The bad smell of the corrosive poison had gotten thicker. I was starting to feel slight pain in my eyes and throat. Moving a lot caused me to inhale more air into my lungs, which shortened my life in turn.

Grave seemed to be feeling it too. He pressed his sleeve on his mouth to shorten his breath while turning his left arm toward me.

This is the end, Aria!

Grave fired the steel blade string once more.

Grave, you said that I was aiming to take you down at the cost of my life. That I had been degraded into a dog who risked my life for the royal family. But you're wrong. I spread poison in order to kill you without fail…….

And also……to corner myself.

□──Iron Rose──□

My pink hair changed color again into ashen iron blue color like a burning iron. Residues of light scattered away from my whole body and flapped like silver wings as though to represent my fighting spirit.

I dodged the string with a speed that was three times faster than ordinary person, even so I couldn't completely dodge the invisible string and my shoulder was cut.

□I already saw that technique!□

In that moment, I felt the mana that was released from Grave's artificial arm spreading out. Most likely it was to make the steel blade string that was fired straightforwardly to split into several paths before surrounding me from all directions.

But, Grave……the technique that you saw wasn't the "real" one.

Battle Skill [Iron Rose] wasn't such a simple technique. I couldn't dodge the steel blade string and you thinking that you could kill me with that, those were all because I was unable to use Iron Rose correctly.

When I fought Gilgan of the assassin guild in the eastern forest, I sought speed that rivaled Iron Rose and reproduced Iron Rose's mana flow just for a moment.

It resulted in my legs getting badly damaged, but it made me wondered if that action could also be used for controlling the Battle Skill.

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▼Aria (Alicia)　Race□Human♀□Rank □

□Magic Power□□□□□□□□□□Stamina□□□□□□□□□

□Strength□10□22□□□Endurance□10□22□□□Speed□17□36□□□Dexterity□□□10□□

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□□□During Special Body Strengthening□□□□□□□

□Battle Skill□Iron Rose/ Limit 163 Second□

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I filled my legs with the strength of my whole body and dodged the approaching blades by relying on the killing intent enveloping them. Even so my arms and flanks got shallowly slashed.

Get serious. Drive yourself until the corner with no way out. You'll die if you lose here. Then nobody will save Elena. It's still not enough. Faster. Strain your eyes. Focus. The strength to fight is already inside yourself.

The faint mana that was inside the steel blade string. The killing intent that wanted to end my life. And then the mana of my blood that was stuck on the dozen or so steel strings after slashing me so many times, approaching from all direction. They all showed me the strings' position just for an instant.

I tore away the muffler that was covering my mouth and took a deep breath without regard of the poison in order to exert my full strength. Then I yelled a word in spirit language.

Faster
□A Re-!□

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▼Aria (Alicia)　Race□Human♀□Rank □

□Magic Power□□59□□2□□□Stamina□113□□□□□

□Strength□10□14□□▽8DOWN□Endurance□10□14□□▽8DOWN

□Speed□17□52□□△16UP□Dexterity□□□10□□

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□□□During Special Body Strengthening□□□□□□□

□Battle Skill□Iron Rose/ Limit 159 Second□

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In that moment, my field of vision turned grey just like in the battle at that forest. While the scenery was moving slowly as though we were inside molasses, I slipped through the trajectory of the blades that I saw just for an instant and closed the distance to Grave. I passed him as his eyes slowly widened and tore his throat with my black knife at the same time.

Blood sprayed everywhere. Meanwhile I noticed how my whole body was screaming in pain and immediately dispelled Iron Rose while siding on the ground. Grave turned around with an aghast look and I met his dark red eyes.

□……Guo□

Grave tried to say something, but blood spilled out from his mouth instead.

□Cough……□

I also spat out blood because of the poison that I inhaled. I didn't wipe it away and raised my black knife at the ready.

There wasn't any difference with our "way of life". But, at the last moment, when you became "aware" of death, you stopped moving and relied on your artificial arm, while I struggled to overcome death.

□□……□□

We stared at each other without moving at all. Grave's right arm stabbed his sword into the ground, while his artificial left arm also stopped moving as though it had lost its function.

Even so I kept my knife raised in vigilance. I received Grave's eyes that were filled with ghastly glint with a cold gaze.

□I'll watch you until you die……□

□……□

I didn't let my guard down for even a moment. Was it anger or despair that rose into Grave's head when he heard my words?

The blood that was flowing out from Grave's neck was eroding his life. Just like when I killed a bandit leader as my first experience, I continued to stare at him with my knife at the ready until all spirits and light vanished from those eyes and he lost his life.

□Grave……as I thought, you and I can't understand each other.□

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▼ Aria (Alicia)　Race : Human♀ –　Rank 4

□Magic Power : 121/320□△20UP□Stamina : 75/250□

□Strength : 10 (14)□□Endurance : 10 (14)□□Agility : 17 (24)□□Dexterity : 9□

□Short Sword Skill Level 4□□Martial Art Level 4□

□Throwing Level 4□□Archery Level 2□□Defense Level 4□□String Control Level 4□

□Light Magic Level 3□□Darkness Magic Level 4□□Non-Elemental Magic Level 4□

□Daily Life Magic×□□□Magic Power Control Level 5□△1Up□Pressure Level 4□

□Stealth Level 4□□Night Vision Level 2□□Search Level 4□

□Poison Resistance Level 3□□Abnormal Status Resistance Level 1□

□Simple Appraisal□

□Overall Combat Strength : 1428 (With Body Strengthening : 1774)□△ 89 UP

The Targeted Princess

□……Treat……□

After confirming Grave's death, I left the room that was filled with corrosive poison and immediately detoxified myself.

Originally it was a poison with liquid form. It lost its instant lethality in its gas form, but I had inhaled too much of it into my lungs in order to finish the battle quickly. I leaned on the corridor's wall and healed my lungs with Cure. Then I wiped the blood on my mouth and ran through the dark corridor.

Grave was an opponent that I had a deep tie with. Originally I wanted to settle things with him through a proper battle but……that guy's way of life was just too awkward…….

Grave surely had his own thinking but, his feeling couldn't reach me anymore because he started something unnecessary.

I ran while drinking healing potion and mana recovery potion of my own creation. My mana and stamina had decreased greatly. I was aware that I had been reckless, even so there was something that I obtained from it.

Iron Rose that was specialized for speed. From previously I had been persisting with fighting style that focused on speed which was my defining trait, but after going through many battles where I put my body through the wringer, I was able to obtain a new trump card though it put a great burden on my body and consumed a lot of mana.

Perhaps it was thanks to all those times overdoing it. My <Magic Power Control> skill had reached level 5. It was the limit of human race, a domain

that could only be attained by the chosen people. It was just a single step, but I had stepped into such domain.

I used that magic power control to focus the strengthening on my muscle strength and smashed the boards blocking the window at the height of around the fourth floor with my kick. The sun had already set and the sky was becoming dark. I leaped out.

「Nero!!」

I yelled toward the night sky.

「GAAAAAAOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!」

A black gale responded and cut through the night. With a roar it ran up the castle wall and picked me who was fluttering through the sky on its back.

My eyes that had night vision could see the corpses of hundreds of defectives scattered throughout the forest. I patted the back of Nero who had drawn away that many enemies for me. Then I turned my gaze toward the direction where Nero's whisker was pointing at. There a vampire was dying after Nero ripped him up.

If I remembered correctly, that vampire was one of the vampires that Gostoura was leading. Most likely he stayed behind to fight Nero so Gostoura and the others could go ahead.

It didn't matter that he was an evil race and a vampire. I felt his resolve in risking his life for the sake of his comrade. I braced myself because I wouldn't be able to take advantage of the opponent's arrogance this time like all the times before.

「Nero. We're chasing the vampires.」

「GAAAAAAAAAAA!」

***

Normally it would take around three weeks until one month to travel from Marquis Kendra's territory until the capital. But that was in case the traveler went through territory where humans lived and the safety was guaranteed to a degree, by carriage or on foot. That travel period could be shortened to around one week by using abnormal route of deep forest where wild animals and monsters were living.

That day, in the noble mansion inside the sorcery academy near the capital's outskirt, the servants were shocked and flustered by the sudden return of the noble daughter who was their master.

「Carla-sama!?」

「You have returned!?」

「Weren't you heading to Kendras-?」

「That look……」

「I returned just now.」

Carla suddenly appeared at the entrance hall inside the mansion. Her sickly white skin was still entwined by black thorn. She didn't reply any further to the flustered servants and only told them her demand.

「Rather than that, I want to drink tea with honey. After that I also want to soak in hot water, so can you all prepare them immediately?」

「Y-yes-」

「We shall prepare them right away!」

The mansion's servants recalled their role and started moving in a hurry. The house of Count Lester was a house that was famous in sorcery and it had produced a lot of royal court sorcerer, but it had few dependents for a high ranked noble house and the number of servant was also few because of their strong paranoia.

Many of the servants also doubled as disciples of the current head of the house who was the head of the royal court sorcerers, but the young Carla once killed more than half of the sorcery disciples.

There was no servant who wanted to follow Carla who was being feared in Lester House. The servants here were outsiders who got brought in by an old butler who was the only person who had ever felt concern for Carla ever since she was little.

People who were sold by their parents because of debt, people who committed crime because they had no choice, people who couldn't find proper work. The majority of the servants here were people like that, but because of that the position as Carla's servant became a support for these people who had no other place to run away to because Carla never mistreated anyone as long they weren't hostile.

「How rushed.」

Carla chuckled cynically seeing her own servants fearing her and went away without even helping her, their master to change her clothes. Carla went to her room at the second floor on her own feet, and there she finally dispelled her Gift, the Soul Thorn.

「……cough」

She coughed a little and a trickle of blood slipped out from the corner of her lips.

Carla was able to return from a place that should be several days away from here because she used the infinite mana of Soul Thorn to cast level 6 darkness magic Teleport.

She didn't use it to go there because she could only use it to a place that she had visited herself. But that wasn't all, Carla herself also simply wished to act together with Aria.

「Fufu……」

Carla sat down on a single-seat sofa inside her dark room and smiled in remembrance.

She couldn't see what happen inside the castle, but she had seen from afar the vampires coming out of the castle and fighting the mythical beast Coeurl. From the several available options, they had chosen to attack the royal family……furthermore she guessed that they would target the princess who didn't have Aria at her side.

The current crown prince Ervan wasn't an incompetent, but he didn't have the resolve like her little sister Elena who could be entrusted with the live of the twelve million populaces and cut them off if necessary.

Elena already had such resolve when she was seven years old. Aria and Carla were also able to understand and accept such thing at that age. It wasn't refutable that the three of them were out of the norm, but it didn't change the fact that Ervan was clearly inferior compared to them.

If this was a peaceful era then he would still become an ordinary king despite that, but in this situation, if Carla was in the position of the vampires who had the mission of diminishing the national strength of Claydale Kingdom, she would also think that the princess was in the way.

Was Aria able to win against that man? Would Aria be able to protect the princess?

Even though Aria had the strength of an upper rank 4 and could fight evenly even against rank 5 enemy, it should be difficult to accomplish either of those. The possibility of accomplished either of them would jump up if Carla lend a hand, but she had no intention of interfering with Aria's battle.

□……Because, you will definitely win.□

It would be difficult for Aria to win. Even so Carla didn't have even the slightest doubt of Aria's victory.

Aria would become even stronger when this battle ended. Carla's only interest was in her future fight with Aria. She had no interest in the life of

anyone else.

Carla had overworked herself in this battle and she would fall into comatose state for several days after this. Even knowing that a cheerful smile like a little child formed on her sickly face.

「I wonder who will have died when I wake up……」

***

The evil race vampires were sprinting through the dark forest like ghosts. Although they were undead who didn't need rest, their life force and mana were still limited as long as they existed in this material world. They required "sleep" during noon in order to maintain their regenerative power and high physical parameters.

In vampire's case, they were maintaining their immortality by absorbing other people's soul through the intermediary of blood, and obtaining darkness and earth magic particles by sleeping at graveyard, but right now that wasn't an option for them.

「Gostoura-sama……」

「As expected, with that body」

「……Don't worry, Restes, Garrey. I won't perish from just this much. Besides we can't let our guard down against them. You two just focus on what you have to do.」

「「……Yes-」」

Gostoura's subordinates could only nod even though they couldn't accept his words.

A vampire's body could regenerate from any wound as long as they had time and mana. But, Gostoura's right arm that was torn off by Carla was still not regenerating. His face that shouldn't feel any pain was grimacing.

Spirit that had no flesh body in the material world still received around ten percent of damage even from normal weapon because of the power of will like hostility or malice from the attacker. It was said that willpower reacted with mana and left behind some effect.

An undead who couldn't feel physical pain easily was now feeling agony because the "malice" of Carla who did it was polluting his body and even his soul.

That Carla would pursue them after time passed. The black beast that had massacred the defectives that they created to be their vanguards would also pursue after them sooner or later even though one of them had stayed behind to hold it back.

And then there was also that "Ash Crowned Princess" who possessed such abnormal strength. Grave was a strong warrior even in Gostoura's eyes, but there was no guarantee that he would be able to stop her.

It was unthinkable that Carla and the ash crowned girl appeared at the same time by coincidence. Even if the two of them were dispatched by the country, there should be someone else who leaked the information about them.

As he thought human couldn't be trusted. There was Carla from the beginning, and even the nobles who were the employer of Grave and Tabatha, anyone of them could possibly betray Gostoura and his men after making use of them.

(Absolutely unforgivable!)

Gostoura fanned up his hatred toward human race once more.

Even the evil race wasn't a monolith. It was in a situation where the human extermination faction and the peaceful faction were constantly in quarrel against each other since a long time ago.

But vampire clan was a clan that wasn't fully trusted because they were monsters despite being a member of the evil race. If the peaceful faction

won, there was a fear that one day the vampire clan would be driven out from the evil race.

They would kidnap the princess, then made use of her to deal a blow to the human nations, triggering a new war.

They would fan up the conflict within the evil race using the princess as bait, then they would display the usefulness of vampire race in the war that started against the human race.

(Chief……I'll definitely play my part in creating a place for our clan to belong.)

In order to not waste the lives of their comrades who had been sacrificed, Gostoura and his men were reluctant to spend time even for regenerating their wounds and kept running through the dark forest day and night. Their only remaining path was to advance while literally shaving off their life for that.

***

Even the sorcery academy had security. It was the alma mater of almost all of the nobles in Claydale Kingdom. This academy that was attended by their own children and relatives drew a lot of donations which were used to form its own private knight order that numbered 200 people.

Of course it was impossible to patrol the whole academy that had the same size like the capital with just that number, but the academy was surrounded by a primeval forest, turning it into a natural forest that prevented any horsed or armored troops from approaching.

Other than that, any high ranked noble house would naturally send several guards to come with their children. There were also several hundred guards in addition. So it was thought that the academy had adequate security as long as there was no situation like before where a part of the knight order turned traitor.

But such thinking also caused carelessness. In the princess's case, the number of noble houses that could be trusted was few, so she could only bring a platoon of royal guard with her. Originally that would be enough, because normally black ops knights and the adventurer girl who was a member of Rainbow Sword would also be guarding the princess, so mere assassin wouldn't even become a problem.

But now……the figure of the girl who was called "Ash Crowned Princess" and feared by the people of the underworld wasn't at the side of Princess Elena.

「Aria……please, come back safely.」

Elena appeared on the terrace of her room while still wearing nightclothes. She looked up to the moon floating at the night sky and quietly linked her fingers together and offered a prayer for the girl who was the only one in this world she had bared her heart to.

Without even noticing that the greatest danger was approaching herself…….

***

A black beast and a girl on its back was rushing through a thick forest that was filled with huge trees. It was dark there even during noon.

There was no flat road or clear sight anywhere. Even so the two jumped over a huge stone that spanned several meters without even slowing down at all and rushed through the trees that were grouped in complicated pattern like a labyrinth with zigzagging movement.

The trees that they had passed until this point had the traces of animal claws left on them. The corpses of monsters that were cut down or ripped up at various points were rolling on the ground as though they were guidepost.

「GIGYAAAAAH!」

From above the trees, several things with human silhouette that had wings growing on their body attacked that beast and girl.

They were rank 3 monsters that were called harpy. They had the wings and claws of bird of prey, with upper body that looked like human female. They thought they had overwhelming advantage deep inside the forest and attacked with warped smiles, imagining the pitiful prey that they were going to rip apart after this.

「Annoying.」

The girl's voice flowed inside the dark forest. A slashing pendulum flew in that moment and cut the neck of one harpy. While blood sprayed up in the air, a scythe pendulum tore the wings of the harpies and they fell down where the claws of the black beast immediately ripped them up. The girl and beast continued running through the dark forest without slowing down for even a moment.

***

「……It's cold today.」

The season was spring but sometimes the night would still feel chilly. The dusk had passed and the sky of the sorcery academy was starting to become dark. A man wearing the janitor overall slovenly was looking up to the sky while opening the lid of a copper flask and took just a sip from it.

The content of the flask was distilled fruit wine. He was still in the middle of work so it seemed frivolous of him to carry such thing but, distilled alcohol could also be used to sterilize wound and also as restorative. It could also warm the body if it was drunk slightly like this. It could be said as an essential for adventurer who worked solo.

「……Let's stop.」

He wanted to take another sip because of this out-of-season coldness, even so drinking anymore than this would cause hindrance to his work so Viro held back with a frown.

Viro was a member of adventurer party “Rainbow Sword” that was distinguished through the whole country. He was infiltrating the academy as a janitor because he got assignment to guard the princess who became a student here.

The members of Rainbow Sword who received the assignment this time was only the scout Viro who could blend into anywhere naturally and Aria who wouldn’t be suspected even if she was inside the academy.

Aria was in charge of protecting the princess from nearby seeing that she had the same gender and age with the princess, while Viro was in charge of standing guard at the surrounding and gathering information. Even so the royal guards took over the guard duty after the princess returned to her mansion, but this time Aria was absent from the academy in order to subjugate Grave, so Viro also continued to patrol the surrounding when night came.

Attacker that was hired by middle ranked noble could be taken care of by the royal guard, no problem. In the first place, attacking the academy that was located close to the capital would also bring a lot of political risk to the attacker, so it was something that rarely happened.

Even so, sometimes there were also people who couldn’t read the situation or people who held unjustified resentment who would send their skilled subordinate as assassin. That kind of people had gotten dealt with by Viro and the black ops without ever being able to reach the princess who was guarded by Aria.

(……Something’s odd.)

Viro stored his flask in his pocket and touched his mythril short sword with his finger in exchange. He was grumbling in his heart. This coldness wasn’t because of the weather. Viro’s instinct that he had cultivated in the border of life and death for many years had sensed something out of place in the air. He switched mood from acting as security to preparing for a fight.

The number of personnel from the black ops had also been increased because of the insurrection of the second knight order before. Right now it

was still nothing more than a vague warning from Viro's instinct, but just in case something really happened, Viro left behind instruction to the black ops' contact network to increase the vigilance while he ran toward the princess's mansion by himself.

***

「……What's wrong?」

Two academy knights were patrolling near the forest at the northern side of the academy on horse. One of them stopped his horse and turned toward his colleague.

「No, something……」

The thick forest that was surrounding the academy was like a barrier that refused entry. But the tree grouping at the northern side was especially thick, so it was dark even at noon. It was really rare but sometimes wolf or stray dog could also appear from there, so the academy knights often patrolled this area. The knight who stopped his horse was feeling something like a chill from inside that forest.

He turned his face toward his colleague who was asking him question in order to tell him about that feeling, but right in that instant, that colleague got assaulted by a black shadow that shot out from the forest.

「What-!?」

The knight raised a shocked voice. In front of him, his comrade got his neck bitten without him being able to even make a voice. Then his comrade's body crumbled down like a withered tree while he was looking. The attacking black shadow showed crimson eyes and fangs that glistened from blood inside the thin darkness. The moment the knight realized the attacker's true identity, two shadows shot out once more from the dark forest and bit him. He lost his life in an instant.

「Let's go.」

One of the shadows raised his voice. The other two who were slurping blood greedily raised their faces.

They knew the location where their target was staying. They had even postponed sucking blood until they arrived here but, there should be nobody who could stop them after coming this far.

The vampires were sure of that and started moving like ghosts into the academy that had gotten dark after the sun set.

.

Gyah!?

The evil race vampires, Gostoura and his subordinates ran into an academy knight on the way. They didn't hide and killed him as they passed by.

Their parameters had gone down somewhat because of their forced march until here, but rank 2 knight still wouldn't even be a hindrance against them. And more than that, the information that they obtained from Tabatha's master also included the academy's security which was useful to shorten their traveling time.

That master……Clara didn't have the intention of leaking that much information, but Tabatha felt humiliation from getting [pitied] by her as a fellow woman and did this as revenge.

Like that the vampires sprinted through the academy. In that short time they had bared their fangs on six academy knights and several unfortunate students with bad behavior who were still out at this hour. Then they finally arrived at the princess's mansion.

The princess was guarded by a platoon of royal guards, ten knights and several soldiers who served as their attendants. Other than them there were only the black ops' bodyguard maid and butler at the princess's side. This number wasn't even half of the crown prince's guard, but that was just how few people that the princess could trust because so many were trying to make use of her.

But, there was no point in number that was just for appearance. After all the girl who was called the “Ash Crowned Princess” and be thought as the most troublesome factor inside this academy other than also being the princess’s bodyguard was currently absent.

At this time, there were only two knights and two soldiers of the royal guards standing guard outside the mansion.

The fence surrounding the mansion had magical protection and breaking through to jump over it would take time, so Gostoura and his men decided to make use of their ability to “bulldoze” through.

「Gah!?」

The chakram that was thrown by a vampire who looked like someone around the age of thirty split the head of one soldier, killing him instantly.

「Wha-」

「E-enemy attack-!」

The remaining soldier ran into the mansion to call for reinforcement. The knights immediately readied their shield and blocked the chakram that was thrown to that soldier’s back.

「You bastards!」

「Black skin……no way, evil race-!」

Gostoura bared his fangs in a grin at the knights’ reaction.

「I won’t tell you two to move aside. Go ahead to that world from your effort in protecting the princess.」

「Screw you! You won’t reach her highness!」

「Wait!」

The young knight ran toward Gostoura with his sword and shield at the ready. The other knight couldn't stop him in time. A female vampire holding two kukuri knives that looked like hatchet slipped beside the shield and slashed open the young knight's side.

「Guah」

「What a sweet smell……it's too bad that we have no time to suck your blood.」

「Those fangs, don't tell me!?」

The vampires here were specially chosen from among the vampire clan. Every one of them had rank 4 strength even before becoming vampire. Their combat strength then got doubled from becoming vampire.

「Now, die. We will also follow behind you sooner or later.」

The knights felt extraordinary resolve from the female vampire's words.

She raised her kukuri knife without the other knight unable to even approach closer, but Gostoura suddenly moved and swung his sword.

Clang!

A throwing knife got deflected and stabbed into the ground. A man appeared from the darkness at the other side.

「Are you alright guys!?」

「Sir Viro!」

The expressions of the knights were lit up with hope seeing a high ranked adventurer like Viro showing up. At the same time several other knights also appeared from the mansion. The female vampire clicked her tongue in annoyance seeing the situation changed drastically.

「Gostoura-sama, Garrey. Leave this place to me and go ahead.」

「……Take care.」

Gostoura spoke briefly to the female vampire, then the other vampire called Garrey nodded deeply and the two of them jumped over the head of the approaching knights to head toward the mansion.

「What's with that physical ability!?」

「Sir Viro, they might be vampire!」

「Tsk!」

Clang!

Viro tried to chase after them when he heard that, but the female vampire's kukuri knife stopped him. Viro blocked it with his short sword.

「They're entrusting this place to me. I won't let you leave.」

「Shit, you guys go after them! Don't let them get near her highness!」

The knights who were flustered for a moment from seeing the vampires' impossible physical ability immediately came to their senses from Viro's scolding. The knight captain Mash nodded at Viro.

「Sir Viro, take care of this place!」

「Ou!」

「I also won't let you guys──」

The female vampire tried to throw her kukuri knife toward those knights, but this time it was Viro's throwing knife that stopped it.

「It's the opposite this time. There's no way I can let you leave right?」

「You lowly human……」

The moment the female vampire bared her fangs, light was lit up to illuminate the surrounding darkness.

Viro checked with only his gaze. The knight whose side got cut was using Light despite his serious wound.

There would be no problem if Viro was alone but, if the opponent was a vampire who lived in darkness, it would be pointless for the humans here to fight in the darkness too. But, the knights held their breath when they saw the figure of the female vampire that appeared under the light. Viro sighed and spat out his words.

「Tsk, how unlucky I can be that I have to face this kind of beauty. I'm not good at all when facing woman.」

「……Even though I look like this?」

The vampire looked like a young woman with black skin and silver hair. But, that skin that should look beautiful had been burned hideously. It exposed a horrible appearance that even a vampire was unable to regenerate fully.

Most likely it was the after-effect of moving even during noon. They were choosing to move through dark forest, but even the slight sunlight that was filtering through trees should mercilessly bring ruin for vampire. Even so they were able to arrive until this far thanks to the regenerative power of high ranked vampire and their tenacity that overcame even their physical pain.

Her rank 4 skill and physical ability hadn't vanished even with her body in such ragged state. It was clear that he would be at disadvantage if he faced this opponent head-on, even so Viro cracked a joke to fire up himself.

「True beauty can't be hidden with just scar y'know?」

「……What an amusing man. Can you tell me your name?」

The female vampire smiled slightly with just her lips. Viro too grinned and made a manly smile.

「I'm Viro.」

Viro raised his knife. The woman also readied her two kukuri knives and faced him from the front.

「My name is Restes. Viro……I'll face you seriously.」

***

「Don't let them reach her highness!」

The royal guards were desperately holding back the two vampires from approaching Princess Elena's location.

If the attack was carried by normal human, normally they would hold back the attackers so the royalty could run away, but it was night right now and the opponents were vampires, so the standard practice was for the royalty to hide away inside the mansion.

「Guaah!」

A knight was blown away together with his shield by Gostoura's one-handed sword. The chakram that Garrey threw was cutting the soldiers.

There were some who died and some who were still alive. But Gostoura and Garrey didn't waste time to finish off the wounded people and prioritized going further ahead to secure the princess.

「You won't pass!」

「Then show your loyalty by giving your life.」

The number of knights who were still standing on their feet in this place had been reduced to only the six who once also protected Elena inside the dungeon. They had the experience of fighting rank 5 Minotaurus Brute and endured even the fierce attacks of Gostoura and his subordinate who had

similar combat strength, but it was clear to see that it was just a matter of time until their defense crumbled.

「UOOOOOOOOOH!」

「HAAAAH!」

The knight captain Mash who was once saved by Aria and Gostoura clashed. Sparks scattered from their weapons.

The knights were upper rank 3 with combat strength of nearly 500, but Gostoura's combat strength was nearly 2000 even though he only had one arm now. Mash who was holding a shield was unable to block his attack and got sent flying until he hit the knight behind him.

「……Guh」

「Gostoura-sama!?」

But, Gostoura was also wounded and had gone through an unreasonable forced march to reach this place. He fell on his knee and Garrey who was defeating the soldiers rushed toward him.

「……No problem. Let's go.」

「Yes-」

「……W-wait」

Mash who was still unconscious reached out with his hand from the floor. Garrey kicked him away and destroyed the door of the last and most protected room. Inside the room there was Elena holding a knife, the butler Joseph holding a sword to protect her, and the knight type bodyguard maid Chloe holding a large shield while glaring at Gostoura.

Elena's knife wasn't for fighting. It was to kill herself as the last resort. As a princess she had been raised to choose death rather than allowing the enemy to take advantage of her.

「……Hoo」

Even then Elena's eyes were still alive. It caused Gostoura to reflexively sigh in admiration.

The strength of those eyes showed the strength of her will. That strength of heart to keep struggling until the very end assured him that his thinking of taking her away to weaken this country and the lives he spent to carry out that plan weren't a mistake.

It wasn't just Joseph and Chloe who were protecting Elena. Even the common maids who clearly hadn't received any combat training were surrounding the princess on their own will even while trembling in order to protect her.

「Princess. We shall spare the lives of these people if you obediently surrender yourself to us.」

「Nonsense. I won't allow you to ridicule the resolve of these people.」

「……That was rude of me.」

Gostoura narrowed his eyes as though he had just seen something dazzling. He raised his sword. Garrey wordlessly took out his chakram. Seeing that caused the common maids to raise muffled screams.

Elena thought of the girl who once promised her to [not give up]……, suddenly she felt something and turned her gaze toward the window.

Outside that window──.

There was the figure of a black beast rushing through the darkness. The black beast cut through the wind and darkness, running like a fired arrow, and then it suddenly put a brake while leaving behind furrows on its wake. The silhouette that was holding the beast's tail on its back made use of that recoil and got sent flying, breaking through the large window at the second floor and entered inside the room.

Gashaaan!

Pinkish blond hair fluttered amidst the scattering glass fragments. Elena yelled the name of the girl who swept aside her skirt and threw knives at Gostoura and Garrey to hold them back.

.

Aria-!

Sorry to make you wait, Elena.

The pink haired girl──”Ash Crowned Princess” Aria.

She was one of the prominent adventurers in this country. Her reputation wasn’t limited to just inside this academy. Even their new collaborators regarded her as dangerous enemy that would pose the greatest difficulty for them. And she had caught up to them just when they were a step away from completing their mission.

She had a fierce yet lovely appearance. She looked haggard and slightly dirty all over, with dried blood of her enemies clinging on her whole body. But there was still beauty in such look. Most likely it was her way of living itself that made the people looking at her felt such impression. The princess’s expression brightened just from her entrance, while the eyes of the people around her light up with hope. Gostoura’s eyes narrowed slightly seeing that.

「Gostoura-sama, leave this to me.」

The adult looking vampire Garrey pulled out Aria’s knife that pierced his arm with irritation and threw it violently on the floor. Then he struck the two chakrams in his hands to make a distorted sound menacingly.

「It looks like your combat strength has gone down. Don’t think you can win against me like htat.」

The combat strength of Garrey and the others had also decreased from their forced march, but Aria’s combat strength had also decreased considerably compared to when they saw her in the castle. Gostoura also decided to leave her to Garrey after seeing that and turned his focus slightly toward Elena. Right in that moment──

「Guooooh!?」

「Tsu!」

A disk shaped blade flew through the air and tore Garrey’s face from the side. In that instant, Aria jumped ahead with abnormal speed.

Clang!

Sparks scattered when Aria's black dagger clashed with Gostoura's sword. Her jade green eyes had no fear or anxiety, only fighting spirit in them. Gostoura felt a chill from that and couldn't stop himself from taking a distance.

Uoooooooooooh!

From behind him, Garrey who got one eye destroyed threw his chakram. Aria somersaulted backward to dodge that attack lithely. Gostoura attacked in that timing, but Aria kicked his arm to open even more distance. Aria then confronted the vampires with her distance from Elena and her distance from the vampires being equal to each other.

Gostoura and Garrey, the moment any one of them went toward Elena, Aria would attack them from the side.

She had no mercy. No hesitation. And also no fear or any other mental weakness. Where did a girl who was still this young obtain such battle sense?

(What in the world is this girl……)

Her combat level wasn't any different from Gostoura and others. And they the vampires should have superior physical ability and battle experience considering the long time they had lived.

And yet they couldn't kill her. That fighting style and eerie presence reminded him greatly of the female evil race called [War Demon] who was said to die in the war against the human race decades ago.

A human little girl……want to take on the two of us at the same time-

Garrey seemed to feel that eeriness too. A veteran warrior like him was using an unusually strong wording. Gostoura stopped him.

□Don’t get emotional Garrey. Think of that girl as the same like that black haired sorcerer. Restes will defeat that man and catch up to us if we wait for a bit. We’ll take her down then.□

□……Yes-□

Garrey reluctantly drew back his weapon to tighten his defense. Then Aria who was listening to their conversation silently opened her mouth while holding her knife and dagger away from each other.

□Your friend won’t come. If the man that you referred to is “him”…… despite his look, he’s still one of my teachers.□

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□I won’t be able to keep you company for long you know?□

□That’s my line.□

The female evil race vampire Restes said those words under the sorcery light that was faintly illuminating the night. Viro replied back lightly to that.

But, unlike the lightness of his tone, the air between the two was painfully tense.

Restes had a reason to risk her life for the sake of her comrades. Viro too had something that he had to protect no matter what. Both sides couldn’t allow their opponent to go ahead. Only the winner of this fight would be able to rush to their comrades’ defense.

.

▼Restes　Race□Dark Elf♀□Vampire□□Assumed Rank □

□Magic Power□□□□□□□□□□Stamina□□□□□□□□□

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□×□□□□□□□□□

.

(Craaap……)

Viro secretly got cold sweat when he saw Restes's combat strength.

Viro's overall combat strength with physical reinforcement added was 1281. Technique wise, the opponent was also rank 4 like him. Furthermore she was a vampire whose status received strengthening the higher their rank was.

But there was opening that he could take advantage of. A vampire's combat strength got calculated as double because of their regeneration ability, but Restes's combat strength was lower than the maximum value. It was clear from looking at her stamina that her vampiric regeneration had degraded from travelling even during noon.

He still had a chance like this. But death would be waiting for him if he lowered his guard. An undead like Restes wouldn't die from normal method. Short sword that relied on attack speed also wouldn't be able to inflict satisfactory damage.

Can't be helped! Let's do this!

Viro spoke out to fire up himself and he lowered his stance. Restes looked somewhat exasperated seeing that while in front of him, Viro's mythril short sword swept over the ground to throw dust at Restes's face.

Cheap trick!

Restes swung around her kukuri knives to sweep away the dust with the wind pressure and she stepped forward. But her leg stopped for a moment. Restes's knee bent slightly and then she bent backward while pulling back her neck. A moment later a mythril knife flew past from the side and grazed her black throat.

She continued to somersault backward and opened the distance. Then she pulled out the throwing knife that had stabbed her right knee before she

knew it and threw it to the darkness.

「What a crafty man……」

「Thanks for the praise!」

Viro grinned at the sarcastic praise and leaped forward.

A throwing knife wouldn't deal a serious damage even if it hit. That was why Viro threw the knife under the cover of the dust and used the undead's tendency to not mind small wound to kill her knee. He tried to decide the battle in an instant with that.

But, the same trick wouldn't work again. Viro didn't miss this chance and attacked like surging waves. Restes too used her high physical ability to parry Viro's attacks with her two kukuri knives even while her posture was unbalanced.

「……This is rank 4」

The two royal guards who remained behind in this place gulped seeing the battle between rank 4. They should be giving backup to Viro, but they couldn't even do anything to interfere.

In the eyes of ordinary people, rank 3 knights were experts who had walked far in their path.

But, to go further than that required special talent and mental strength to cut off anything unnecessary for their path. Even though the fight before them was a fight of two knife users that were generally regarded as weak, the knights would need a lot of courage to interfere with that fight.

「HAAAAAAAAAA!!」

Restes got impatient and used her vampiric strength. Her muscles were getting ripped from her forceful movement as she pushed back Viro's knife.

「Kuh」

Viro had muscle strength that was far higher than ordinary people thanks to his level 4 combat skill, but he was getting pushed back by the attack that came from below.

Viro wasn't using two weapons. That was because two sword style had certain weaknesses in contrast to its high attack strength. One of them was the lack of weight in its attack, but Aria overcame that weakness by using two different types of weapons, while Restes compensated for it with her vampiric strength.

In contrast the weakness of using one sword was in its low defensive capability. Fundamentally short sword wasn't suited for exchanging blow head on.

The offense and defense got reversed. Viro was parrying the fierce attack of Restes's two swords style with his one sword. Even though their technique was at the same level, the difference in their attack speed and physical ability was making Viro gradually getting pushed back.

「Tsk!」

Viro glanced around and jumped back while kicking up the ground's dirt. At the same time his left hand pulled out a knife and threw it. This was a strong point of one sword style. The user had one free hand that enabled them to use various attacks but──.

「I knew you will do that!」

Restes had predicted that this man would definitely try something when he got cornered. She didn't even dodge Viro's attack and threw the kukuri knife in her left hand.

「Tsu!」

The kukuri knife pierced Viro's thigh. Viro's throwing knife also hit Restes's leg.

Restes stepped forward even though one of her eyes got blinded by the dust. She aimed at Viro's heart, but Viro was able to barely deflect that blade. However the deflected blade sank deeply into his stomach.

「Guoooh!」

「You gave me some trouble but……it was fun, Viro.」

She was unable to kill him in one hit, but a human would be rendered unable to fight if their stomach got seriously injured.

But it was also because she was unable to kill him that she could have a talk with this amusing human. A smile broke out on her burnt face. Viro too sighed which turned into a cough that let out blood trickling from the corner of his lips.

「As I thought, two swords user is strong……. But, it doesn't suit me though.」

「How about giving it a try in the future? If you want I'll even turn you into my retainer you know……?」

Restes showed her fangs from her lips slightly. Her eyes glinted eerily. Viro slowly shook his head at her offer.

「It's a honor to receive invitation from a beauty like you, but nope.」

「Then die already.」

Restes smiled because she knew that he would answer like that. She strengthened her grip on her knife, but Viro suddenly opened his mouth.

「You see, I'm a teacher despite my look. And I kept telling that girl who is using two swords. Don't let your "guard" down, especially when giving the finishing blow.」

「Eh……」

Dosu……!

Restes's eyes opened wide at the steel blade that stabbed through her chest.

The one who attacked her from behind was one of the knights who remained in this place. Two swords style was powerful but the user needed a lot of concentration when attacking and they became slack with paying attention to the surrounding. That was why Viro was fixated with using one sword and also taught his disciple Aria about that weakness. Aria who followed his teaching was able to deal a serious wound to Gilgan of assassin guild.

Also Viro pretended to fall back while subtly changing their positioning to set the table so that the knights could attack from behind. The wounded knight also got encouraged and stood up while pressing his hand on the wound on his side.

「……You damn humaaann!」

Restes's face warped like an animal and punched the knight who attacked her flying with one hand.

Even though her heart was pierced, the blade slightly missed her magic stone, so Restes still hadn't died.

Viro held up his knife even while his stomach was stabbed. Restes let go of her knife and took a distance from him. She bared her sharp claws and fangs together with her true nature as vampire. Viro grinned seeing that.

「That's why, I told you to look around right?」

.

<——Duck——>

.

The knights reflexively got down when a [voice] suddenly reverberated inside their head. Then a black gale tore Restes's back and passed her by,

leaving behind a mist of black blood sprayed behind it.

「Coeurl!? Don’t tell me, that girl has already caught up!」

The appearance of the black mythical beast Coeurl most likely meant that the dangerous girl who was accompanying it had defeated Grave and chased after them.

Restes had forgotten the damage that she received and turned her focus toward the new threat, but behind her Viro pulled out the kukuri knife from his stomach and raised his mythril knife high above his head.

「──Critical Edge──!」

「Wha-」

The critical attack came from behind her unprotected back. Restes turned around with an astonished look and found the blade cutting through her neck. Her head flew in the air.

Light died out from her eyes. Viro felt like there was a slight smile on her lisp toward him at the end there.

「……See ya, Restes.」

Viro said his farewell to Restes at the end. Then he ran out of strength and fell on his back. He turned his gaze toward Nero who was approaching him.

「Ouch ouch……but, if you’re here that mean that girl has also come back right?」

「Gaa……」

Nero growled to answer Viro on the ground. Viro then closed his eyes in relief.

「Hehe……I leave the rest to you, Aria.」

***

A strange three-way deadlock was forming.

Gostoura and his subordinate would get attacked by me if they tried to attack Elena, and if I made my move first then one of them would attack Elena.

But it wasn't like Elena and others were helpless and could only wait to be protected. Elena could use magic. Her aides Joseph and Chloe were also rank 3. They couldn't fight against Gostoura who had the combat strength of rank 5 although he had been weakened, but they should be able to but a little time at least.

.

▼Aria □Alicia□ Race□Human ♀□Rank □

□Magic Power□105□□20□□Stamina□153□□□□□

□Overall Combat Strength□□□□□□With Special Body Strengthening□□□□□□□

□State□Fatigue□

.

But even before that, I myself had been unable to recover because of getting poisoned and not sleeping for several days. Even using Iron Rose would be difficult for me if I still wanted to use Battle Skill and body strengthening.

Morning would come in several more hours. The situation would change then, but Gostoura and his subordinate was surely aware of that too.

But they were prioritizing to attack Elena even if they had to sacrifice their comrade for it. It was as though everything would be over if they managed to capture Elena. ……Their action was unnatural. Something was strange.

But, it didn't change what I had to do at all. Nero and Viro had used their own body to buy me time and bring me till this far. I'd definitely protect

Elena using my all so that their effort too wouldn’t be wasted.

「You little girl……」

The adult vampire called Garrey finally lost patience and charged toward me with chakrams in both hands. At the same time the one-armed Gostoura went toward Elena. My knife flew toward him at the same time but Garrey’s chakram hit it.

Clang!

I clashed against Garrey while using my left hand to control the weight pendulum I threw. It targeted the back of the head of Gostoura who had his back turned at me.

「Kuh!」

「──Air Bullet──!」

Gostoura dodged the pendulum that came from behind him just barely. Elena took advantage of that opening and shot a wind sorcery at him. It obstructed him and retreated back until his original position. Meanwhile I tried to change position toward Elena’s direction, but Garrey’s chakram flew in front of me and directed me back at my original position.

「Tsk……」

Gostoura looked at Elena and me with irritation, but the feeling was the same.

Also you were underestimating Elena too much. She wasn’t that weak of a woman.

「Nuoooooooooh!」

GIN!

Garrey threw his chakram. I immediately drew back my weight pendulum in high speed and struck it down in the air.

It would be impossible for me to do something like that just a little while ago. But my experience in seeing through Grave's invisible string during my fight against him made this possible.

I was getting stronger bit by bit. I was better today than yesterday. And I would be better tomorrow than today.

Master and Viro also taught me that the combat strength's number was nothing than rough estimate. Cmbat strength was nothing more than status and skill being converted into simple number. In a battle between two high ranked fighters, they needed to willpower to face the battle and experience……things that weren't represented in combat strength.

Clang!

I dodged the chakram that Garrey swung powerfully without averting my gaze until it passed several centimeters in front of my eyes. Then I immediately rotated my whole body and struck with my black dagger on Garrey's forehead.

【Guoooo!?】

【Garrey!】

Even so Galley still hadn't perished. In that moment, Gostoura swung his sword at me from the side after seeing his comrade in danger. A fellow rank 4 would be able to block or dodge that attack. But, if you were able to do that, there was even more thing that you could also do.

【What-!?】

I deflected the sword that was swinging horizontally at my neck by hitting its flat side with my hand chop. It would be me who died if hesitated for even just a little. But I had no hesitation.

【Damn you!】

Garrey swung his chakram from the opposite direction, but I struck it down from above with my hand that was holding my dagger while also moving my body to jump over him. I kicked up midair and used the recoil from that movement to switch posture. Garrey's eyes opened wide seeing that move.

「You bastard, that "technique"-!?」

「──Cyclone──!」

I unleashed the wide area attack Battle Skill that was accompanied with elemental attribute. It cut up Gostoura and Garrey devastatingly.

My perception changed. The world I was seeing changed. I was taking a step deeper into the world of the "strong" that I had just recently started walking into. It focused my mind even deeper.

***

(This girl, she's a monster-)

Aria's combat strength was not that different from them. She also had the appearance of a little girl who had only lived for ten-odd years. And yet, powerful vampires like them couldn't kill her even while outnumbering her.

He didn't understand the reason. Gostoura and Garrey were losing their regenerative power because they didn't rest during noon, but this girl should be weakened too like them.

(Is this the possibility of human growth……)

Gostoura and the other vampires obtained tough body and strength from stopping being human. But they also lost their growth capacity as human at the same time.

But this girl was different. Effort? Talent? This wasn't because of that kind of things. Just like how that princess didn't give up even amidst despair, the human possibility──that "light" of life was something that any human had

inside them though many of them were unable to obtain it due to their weakness. It was light he had such thing flaunted in front of him.

「……Gostoura-sama」

The voice of Garrey who had one eye crushed and his forehead stabbed made Gostoura returned to his senses.

The Cyclone just now was a wide area attack technique that had low strength. It wasn't a technique to be used in one-on-one fight. But that attack managed to shave down the mana of the vampires that was their life force. Even Garrey's small wounds weren't regenerating and his life force was steadily decreasing until a dangerous level.

Aria wasn't doing anything passive like buying time or the like. She was coming at them to hunt their life without fail. Most likely she instinctually knew that ceding the initiative in front of a powerful enemy was the same like losing mentally. Garrey must have noticed that too. He stared at Gostoura with his remaining eye that was starting to turn murky like corpse and questioned his resolve once more.

They were able to come this far thanks to their comrades' sacrifice and devotion. Their comrades that numbered more than ten had fought in the land of foreign country where they couldn't rely on anyone for the sake of their clan's existence.

Perhaps they would be able to accomplish their objective if they had resolved themselves to sacrifice everything from the start. But, Gostoura who was unable to abandon his comrade at this very last moment nodded strongly at the feeling of his last remaining comrade Garrey.

「……Die for me here, Garrey.」

「As you command. ……Please, survive even if it's just you alone, for the clan's survival!!」

Garrey's body warped drastically like an animal. He manifested the true nature of vampire instead of staying a warrior, unleashing all the power in

his possession.

He shouldn’t be able to last for long if he did something like that in his body’s current state. But Garrey had decided to abandon everything for the sake of his clan, for the sake of his dead comrades, and for the sake of future.

Aria changed position to shield Elena after seeing Garrey’s state. Garrey discarded his chakram and attacked her like a beast to prevent her from doing so.

「GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!」

「……」

Aria fixed his gaze on him who was doing such thing and engaged him. She judged the distance so Garrey’s claws would just barely miss her while diverting his arm away. Then she forced herself into the slight opening that was made from that and her knee struck Garrey’s face.

「Guooooh!」

Black blood sprayed up. A broken fang twirled in the air.

The extreme focus made even the time in this battlefield flowed slowly. While Garrey was making Aria completely focused on her, Gostoura took advantage of that single moment to leap toward Elena and the others.

Aria immediately moved toward him, but in that moment, the knocked back Garrey spread out his arms and jumped on her way without putting up any defense.

「You won’t pass me-!!」

Garrey let out a yell of his tenacity with a crushed face that was soaked with blood.

「──Wind Cutter──!」

「──Fire Arrow──!」

Elena and Joseph fired attack sorcery. But Gostoura didn't even dodge and closed the distance despite the wind cutting his neck and the flame burning his face. He tackled Chloe who was on his way with her shield and blew her away together with Joseph and the surrounding maids. And so he arrived at Elena's location even though his life force was whittled down until the limit.

「Elena-!」

In that moment, the throwing knife that Aria threw pierced the back of Gostoura's head. Even so Gostoura didn't stop and immediately kicked Elena who was about to use sorcery. He stepped down on her while taking out a fist sized "sphere" from his pocket.

「Too late──」

Pakin……!

Gostoura crushed that sphere in his grasp. Then magic particles flooded out explosively. It blew away Chloe and Joseph who were trying to stand up.

「……FUHAHA……I did it, Garrey……Rester……my comrades-!」

Gostoura muttered while tears of blood flowed down from his eyes. He glared at Aria who had her dagger planted into Garrey's heart from his back.

「You're too late. Do you know what I just used……humans」

It was the same thing like what Grave once used to drive away Coeurl, what Viro used at the dungeon, the secret treasure of dungeon that contained sorcery in it──a [Jewel].

「That sphere, was filled with the sorcery of [Teleport].」

Gostoura's friend, the chief who was leading the vampire clan entrusted the "Dungeon's Jewel" which was a treasure of their clan for the sake of his comrades who were going to a rigorous mission.

Even in this whole continent, only ten-odd Jewels had been confirmed having level 6 sorcery sealed inside them throughout history. Such things were genuine hidden treasure. Gostoura thanked his friend who entrusted such thing to him, even so he planned to not use it if possible. But, after obtaining information from Grave and the new collaborator, Gostoura and his men thought up a plan to kidnap the princess using that.

Even in Gostoura's opinion, Princess Elena had great qualities to be queen.

At first they planned to kidnap or kill the crown prince to whittle down this country's national power itself. But, that crown prince didn't show any sign of growth. In contrast the princess who should have weak body was showing her healthy figure, and her evaluation was starting to surpass the crown prince.

The vampires changed their plan after that.

They would kidnap the capable princess while the still incompetent prince would succeed the throne.

In order to bring chaos to Claydale Kingdom, they had to disappear the princess while keeping her alive.

If the incompetent prince succeeded the throne, the people who knew about the competence of the princess would surely feel dissatisfied. Those people would give up if the princess wasn't alive anymore, but if she was still alive, the dissatisfaction would become friction inside the kingdom. The kingdom would split into two under the crown prince who didn't have the ability to govern a chaotic country.

Would the crown prince be able to govern the country properly amidst the nobles who were looking for the disappeared princess? Could the crown prince who felt discontent about that become a proper king?

The kingdom’s strength would decline if the evil race simply stir up the friction from behind the scene. Even without the evil race making any move, the surrounding countries would move on their own.

It was a very long term plan that could only be adopted by dark elf that had long lifespan. In the process multiple intentions overlapped that some people even tried to kill the crown prince, but in the end the vampires were able to accomplish their plan like this.

「──kuh」

Elena realized that intention of the evil race from the little information that she was able to glean. Her hand reached toward her knife to kill herself, but Gostoura stepped on her hand.

「Your highness……!」

Nobody could move with the princess taken hostage. Chloe who was collapsed on the floor desperately stretched out her hand. But as though to ridicule her effort, magic particles of darkness started to envelope Gostoura and Elena’s bodies in a circle.

「It’s pointless no matter how you struggle. This sorcery won’t stop activating even if I die. Princess, you can watch your country perish from the evil race count──」

.

「──Iron Rose──」

.

A voice flowed like a wind at that time.

One girl’s hair changed color from pink to ashen iron blue like a burning steel, with light residues trailing behind her like flapping wings. She leaped over everything like a comet and pierced the heart of Gostoura who took off his eyes from her for “an instant” with her black dagger.

「There's no way I'll let you go home alive.」

***

Gostoura whose magic stone in his heart was pierced opened his eyes in disbelief. His eyes wavered slightly before losing their light.

I misjudged the tenacity of the dark elves. I quickly tried to lift up Elena and get out of the magic circle, but it was just as Gostoura said, the sorcery's activation didn't stop and the dark magic particles were enveloping us.

Chloe and Joseph and the others were yelling something from outside, but their voices couldn't reach us anymore.

At the end I mouthed [Leave this to me] to outside and waved my hand lightly at them. Then I embraced Elena's body to protect her.

「Aria……」

「It's fine Elena. I'll be with you.」

The darkness enveloped us completely and we could only see each other inside the darkness. The worried looking Elena smiled after hearing my words and she clung on me.

Gostoura's corpse vanished to a space somewhere else. The two of us also got moved to somewhere else.

It felt like several minutes or several hours had passed……even my own senses became hazy during the teleportation. Then the scenery of night sky and moon suddenly expanded before my eyes.

I looked at the sky and the ground to confirm the up and down. Then I kept holding Elena in my arms while landing on the ground several meters below while softening the impact.

There were few greeneries and the smell of the soil was dry……. I decided that this place wasn't Claydale based on the low temperature and the air's

dryness. I lowered the anxious Elena on the ground and gently helped her to stand up on her own feet.

「You alright?」

「Yes. But……this place?」

「Still unknown.」

There was also no sign of any ambush that I had expected. There wasn't any sign of living thing nearby, far less a settlement of the evil race. We were in the middle of a dry forest. Elena was only wearing slippers and a thin nightgown. I took out a cloak and the academy's loafers from my Storage for her to wear, then we started walking inside the forest.

The night sky was brightening into light ultramarine color. Morning was coming. When we got out of the unfamiliar forest, the scenery that was visible from the top of that hill caused Elena to press her hands over her mouth while her blue eyes widened in shock.

「……Do you recognize the place?」

「……Yes, Aria. This place──」

Bluish white sky with not a single cloud in sight, and a vast desert that seemed to continue forever…….

At the middle of that, there was the ruins of an enormous city, covered in the veil of sand that had the same color like the desert around it.

Elena gulped and muttered softly while grabbing my arm.

.

「……The ancient ruins of the desert……[Resvel]……」

Holiday at Capital

「So troublesome……」

「Eh, why do you dislike it?」

Seo got called once more to Leyton House's secondary residence in the capital in order to accompany Aria's "holding back" training and to see just how much she had recovered from the injury that she got during the outdoor field trip. He reflexively asked back in respond to the mutter that Aria leaked out.

「There, an opening.」

「Uwah」

She drew close to him using only a walking technique that didn't cause her uniform's long skirt to sway. Then she lightly kicked the back of his knee and made him stumbled. Seo who was wearing his butler uniform fell on his back on the garden's lawn.

「Uu~~」

Seo couldn't ask her to go easy on him. Although Aria was an adopted child, she was older than him and a powerful fighter who could even conquer a dungeon or drive away rank 5 assassin, but Seo wished to surpass her in various senses. Because she was a "girl" who he wanted to confess at when he was able to do so.

「Don't lose focus. You will get surrounded by ogre and die on your own like that.」

□No no, normally you will definitely die when getting surrounded by multiple ogres on your own okay?□

Seo felt dizzy seeing just how far he still had to go.

Seo felt like the sense of distance between the two of them had shrunk since they became family, but the gaze that he felt from Aria was just like [a big sister who was warmly watching a naughty little brother]. Seo was dissatisfied by that.

Aria offered her hand to him. He took it and stood up while thinking that he almost caught up to her if it was in height. *Just a little bit more*……he psyched up himself in his heart.

□……And, what is "troublesome"? It'll make it easier to protect her highness as a baron daughter rather than baronet daughter right?□

□I got pestered.□

Aria answered like that as though it was only natural after Seo asked her once more.

Layton House had gotten promoted from being a baronet house which was a low noble rank to baron house which was a middle noble rank.

From the start Aria who had the position as the princess's only attendant despite coming from a low ranked noble house was in a position where she could be easily pestered by high ranked noble. A noble could be promoted in rank by making achievement but, promotion from low rank to middle rank, or from middle rank to high rank was something that rarely happened. The middle ranked nobles who came from noble houses with long history must find themselves offended by it.

Layton House was a house with black ops lineage. Sera was one of the people in charge of the palace's security and she had received very high evaluation for her work from the start. The case with Aria was nothing more than an impetus for the promotion, but to the noble houses that didn't

know anything, it must looked like the promotion was because of the princess's favoritism.

And then the most troublesome thing was…….

「I heard from Sera. It looks like there are several marriage proposals being send my way.」

「Eh!?」

A girl from low ranked noble house serving as the princess's maid wouldn't get that many problems.

Aria was an adopted daughter of a low ranked noble house, so there shouldn't be anyone who thought of using her as political piece. But, with her now coming from a middle ranked noble house, it was only natural that noble houses that wanted to have connection with the upper echelon of the country were having their eyes on Aria who was intimate with the princess.

Perhaps Elena was protecting Aria from that but, the problem wasn't there. The promotion came to be as a reward directly from the king himself because of the incident last time, which made it harder for Aria to stop being a noble easily now.

「I don't wanna Aria getting engaged with other noble!」

「I'm not planning to from the start.」

Rather, it would be Seo who would have it harder from now on because he was now the heir of a baron house.

He also had good look and personality. Surely a lot of female students would approach him when he enrolled into the academy next year.

It seemed that even now there were already senior female students who got their eye on him despite him not being a student……that was what Aria heard from Chloe. She thought him pitiful for being distracted by the engagement talk of his "big sister" and not realizing that.

Although Chloe who was telling Aria about that would want to sigh if she saw Aria not noticing Seo's feeling even after he was talking like that.

「Anyway, I'll try asking Kaa-san about that-! Also Aria, you shouldn't move too much yet. I have to get back to the academy already but, ask someone to accompany you when going into the city okay?」

「Got it.」

.

「……And that was why you called me?」

「Yes.」

Following the warning of her "little brother", Aria looked for someone to accompany her, but the number of her friend was catastrophic, and she also couldn't possibly ask a maid of Leyton House to accompany her because who knew when she would get attacked. In the end he chose Feld who was hanging around in the adventurer guild where he could be easily contacted.

By the why the elf Miranda also felt like someone who would have nothing to do, but currently she was going out touring for sweets in the capital. Aria didn't even know where she was.

「Well, that's fine but……you're looking like a real "lady" now after I took off my eyes from you.」

「That so?」

Perhaps he was taken aback. Her atmosphere was different from the gallant atmosphere when she was just an adventurer. The way she cutely tilted her head made Feld slightly didn't know where to look.

There was also how the maid of Leyton House had put a light makeup on her as the young lady of the house. But perhaps the biggest reason he was taken aback was his realization that she was putting her trust on him.

「And, where are you going?」

「Gelf's shop.」

「……Again huh.」

If asked what places Aria would visit in the capital, it would obviously be the weapon shop, the adventurer guild, or Gelf's shop. And the male faction of Rainbow Sword wasn't good with dealing with the owner of that shop. His existence was traumatizing to them.

Feld felt like he wanted to sigh a little when Aria mentioned their destination dispassionately.

「Well, that's alright……」

It couldn't be seen from her appearance but Aria's legs still hadn't recovered completely. So it would certainly be better for her to have a baggage carrier accompanying her.

Certainly Aria had few acquaintances but, there should be a lot of man who volunteered if she asked for it. At the same time it was easy to imagine that almost none of them wouldn't have any ulterior motive.

(……I guess that's why it must be me.)

Aria's appearance had grown to such degree. Even if his partiality as her comrade was subtracted, Feld too understood that Aria's look was in the top category.

「Then let's go. To Gelf's shop.」

「Right.」

Feld said that thinking that it couldn't be helped because this was Aria. Then he turned his back on her. Aria lightly hopped and put her upper body on his shoulder right at that very moment.

「……Oi」

「My legs are injured.」

「……That's true.」

She should be able to walk normally if she could get on his shoulder so easily without giving away her presence, or, they could simply use carriage in the first place. Such thoughts crossed his mind but, it was pointless to say them at this point, so Feld allowed Aria to do as she pleased.

He didn't dislike carrying Aria on his shoulder, but it made him felt complicated. That was because Feld had a complicated circumstance.

Feld didn't come from a commoner background. He was born from a noble house with territory located at the southeast from the capital, near the border.

The house in the past was known as a warrior house, but now not a trace of it still remained. There were only civil official leaning people in it. But then Feld exhibited extraordinary talent in swordsmanship in such environment.

It had been decided that his older brother would inherit the territory, but the old people who missed the old day started recommending Feld to take the headship, so Feld decided on his own will to join an adventurer guild that was friendly with his father. He did it before he became of age.

Feld had already reached rank 4 when he became grown up. He was clearly abnormal from other people's perspective.

Feld's comrades in Rainbow Sword were all stronger than him, but that was the result of training and real battle experience through a long time.

People like Feld with strength to scatter soldiers during his teenage were special. Until now Feld had constantly lived under the gazes of people who envied and considered him strange.

He met Aria at such time. At first she was still a kid who was dressed like a boy, but the next time he met her, she shocked him so much that it blew away that past impression that he had almost forgotten.

A beautiful girl with rank 4 strength and the appearance of a grownup commoner. He finally found a “kindred” like him with strong power.

But, who could possibly imagine that such girl was still a “kid” whose age was around ten years old?

Their encounter was a mistake. He should have noticed it when the playboy Viro was treating Aria as an [immature girl] rather than a [young girl].

The pretty girl who Feld recognized as his equal was a “kid”, but his first impression of Aria and her sublime strength hindered him to look at Aria as a kid.

In addition the “girl” side and “childish” side that she alternately showed to him with randomness were baffling him.

Aria was actually a kid so he tried to treat her like one but, although Aria never loosened up in front of her teacher Viro, the defenseless face as a girl that she displayed in front of Feld easily broke into his heart.

Feld felt relieved when he heard her reason for that was [because he was like her father that made her felt a peace of mind], at the same time it also allowed Aria to break further into his heart. It made him got stuck with even more complicated feeling than before.

.

「Ooh my, welcome Aria-chan. You have become prettier again. Feld-kyun too, your muscles are always growing to be lovelier and lovelier every time.」

「O-ou」

The rock dwarf Gelf appeared as soon as Aria and Feld arrived. He was wearing a dress that was made from glossy leather. The dress clung tightly on his whole body. The look overwhelmed Feld and he greeted him back falteringly.

「The tights you gave me had gotten soaked with blood, so I want to have them looked after. Also the reward from the kingdom has come out so I want to order a spare. Also are the shoes I ordered finished?」

「……You're really an unwavering child eh.」

Yeah really, Feld thought while nodding deeply.

For some reason Gelf's expression became like a clown whose performance got ignored by the kids. He accepted the transparent tights that Aria handed to him and started scrutinizing it with a craftsman face.

「You had been reckless again hadn't you? Even the mythril's silver string has absorbed too much blood that the black stain remained when it regenerated. Be careful about that, because it'll cause the hardness to decrease. As for the academy's designated loafers, I have fitted them with magic steel plate and also hidden blades in the heels and front tips. But, the loafers have weaker toughness than the boots you used before, so pick the enemy you are going to use them at carefully. As for the spare tights……」

Gelf paused there and pondered for a little bit before hitting his palm.

「Aa, I have a spare. It's a mix of prototype mythril silver string with magic steel black string. Its magic resistance is a bit lower but, its physical resistance goes up slightly in exchange. I also have a bustier made from the same material, so try wearing them at the back to see if their size fit you. Also……their color is black so try wearing a matching underwear. If it's black then I have some unused silk products in stock.」

「Got it.」

「……」

Feld felt like he had heard some lines that a man shouldn't listen to. He focused on something else while getting cold sweat.

Aria was still a kid sensibility-wise even though she had the appearance of a top class beauty. An earnest people like Feld felt his mind tormented by a strange sense of immorality from listening to that kind of topic.

For now it seemed Gelf was acting like a "mother" to make up Aria's insufficiency in the female sensibility department. In actuality he was a mal, a dwarf, and a person of that type, but Feld turned a blind eye toward that.

Aria looked like someone who knew nothing else except fighting, but surely she would become a magnificent woman in the future if she had that kind of existence at her side.

Until then Feld could just look over her like a "father". There was also a "little brother" who was worried about Aria just like him.

Feld was making that kind of compromise inside himself and felt relieved. Then Gelf's flustered voice suddenly came from the back of the shop that was partitioned using a curtain.

「——Aria-chan, wait!」

「Ah, Feld.」

The curtain suddenly opened and a voice called his name. Feld turned around and froze.

「I think the waist is a bit loose and it'll be better to make it a bit more easier to move in, what do you think?」

There, Aria was standing while twisting her waist. She was wearing a black bustier, a black short knickers, a black garter belt, and black tights.

Gelf was searching for a cloth behind her in hurry. Feld dropped the thing he was holding after seeing that. Then he raised his voice with various feelings filling it.

W-WEAR SOME CLOTHESSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS!!

.

The hardships of the males around Aria including Feld would still continue.

The Worry of a Certain Baron Son

There was a certain boy from a baron house in the second year of the sorcery academy.

His house's territory, Seylace territory was located near the northern border. Geographical-wise it was very far from the capital and while he was born as a middle ranked noble in a house that ruled over several tens of thousands of populace, he only had the sensitivity of a country bumpkin. He only learned the "disparity" that existed between "nobles" for the first time after coming to the capital for the first time and living a school life for the first time.

Cultivation. Manners. Military arts. Sorcery. That knowledge was far too removed from his common sense until now.

Even so he didn't have any problem when he enrolled at first. His big sister Maria who was two years older than him was also in the academy. She was helping him with etiquette and how to be courteous to the high ranked nobles.

His highness the crown prince was also studying in the same year as him, but even the high ranked noble from a house that was his house's caregiver could only act as the prince's aide who had to follow him around everywhere. There was no way he could possibly approach such person by himself. It made him realized even more of the disparity that existed between them.

His big sister Maria also graduated the next year. She was engaged with a viscount heir who fell in love with her at first sight inside the academy. Their houses had the same caregiver. Because of that she was spending her days cheerfully doing bride training.

And then he too became a second year student. To take a look at the princess who would enroll into the academy in that year, he went to the academy entrance together with his trusted friends.

Officially all students in the academy were considered “equal” with each other, but that was only the case between fellow low ranked nobles and fellow middle ranked nobles. There was a great wall that separated the high ranked nobles from the rest. If they missed their chance in this academy life, they would have no second chance to be able to see her highness from nearby unless they worked in the palace.

Her highness was truly a [princess]. Her golden hair looked soft and flowingly smooth. Her blue eyes felt like they were drawing them in. Her appearance was beautiful and lovely. They heard that she was sickly in the rumor, but her dignified demeanor as a royalty made his friends who were watching her from hiding to look in fascination.

But, he……Rody Seylace had his eyes stolen not by the beautiful princess, but by the pink haired student who was escorting her highness. He unconsciously spoke her name.

……Aria?

.

Rody’s encounter with Aria happened nearly five years ago when he was still nine years old.

During that time, there was a rumor about a [monstrous person] in Seylace territory. While his family was all worrying about his big sister falling victim to this monstrous person, a maid arrived with an introduction from Margrave Dandall. It was Aria.

At first Aria went around everywhere with maid uniform and manners that were too different from the countryside maid. Rody felt that her action was impertinent and flared up at her but, she easily brushed him aside and treated him like her underling.

Anyway, Aria's existence was just too shocking for him in various meaning.

She had the appearance of a cute maid who was about the same age with him, so it was like her being there was just an unnecessary meddling, but who would believe that she was actually being dispatched there to solve the monstrous person problem?

At that time he had also tried asking his father about Aria, but his father only told him 「I noticed from looking at her but, don't tell me, you actually don't notice~?」 with a smug face. He didn't tell him anything else than that.

Rody investigated about the monstrous person together with Aria, made preparation to fight……in reality he only got interrogated by Aria before getting pushed around by her but, he remembered really well how his heart danced because it felt like a new something would occur in his daily life that was getting gloomy because of the incident.

But, the monstrous person stopped appearing one night and Aria herself also vanished with it.

There were traces of fighting in the baron mansion's courtyard and the city, so they knew that Aria fought the monstrous person, but in the end they didn't find out what happened to Aria.

Since then, Aria became an unforgettable memory for Rody.

Even Rody didn't know whether this feeling was love or not. Perhaps it was just a misunderstanding from a suspension bridge effect but, Aria was a girl who he couldn't forget.

It wasn't like he was thinking something like wanting her pressing him on the wall and glaring at him again.

He was just a boy who was attracted to a slightly older girl. For such a boy……

「Eh? Aria is younger than me!?」

That fact was the most shocking thing for him.

.

「……N-no, it's still not for sure that girl is really Aria.」

He became her underling at first because he thought she was older. And he couldn't wrap his head around the idea of that girl who disappeared suddenly appearing again as the princess's maid. And Aria was cute when he met her in the past, but this girl that he saw was a cool beauty, so Rody couldn't be really sure.

There Rody thought that perhaps his father or sister might know something. He took three silver coins from his pocket money and sent a telegram to his family.

To be more accurate it wasn't a telegram but [distant message], a communication method using a magic tool of distant talk's inferior version. He didn't know how many weeks it would take if he sent letter through the merchant guild, and he would need to pay gold coin to use the distant talk magic tool in the academy, so Rody couldn't use that.

The next day, a distant message came back from his father and sister.

His sister Maria wrote various things about her romantic relationship, like how fun her tryst with her fiancée was, or how delicious the meal in the restaurant that they visited together, etc. It was only after writing that kind of things for long that the message ended with [So you found Aria, I also want to meet her].

「The hell is with this comment!」

The content of the message was really like his calm and gentle big sister, which infuriated him. Even so Rody realized how his sister apparently never thought that Aria had died for even a second. It made him felt a bit down about himself who couldn't have complete faith like that.

The distant message from his father was filled with long complains about his fifteen years old daughter who wouldn't stop talking about her love life and he wished that they would marry already. At the end he ended the message with [Don't worry about that girl].

「What the hell do you mean by don't worry!?」

Perhaps, after Aria went missing his father contacted Dandall or somewhere else and knew something about what happened to her after that. And if it was something related to the princess, it was understandable for that no good father to have this kind of reaction.

Having no other option, Rody tried investigating about the princess's maid on his own but, it didn't take him long to realize just how difficult of an undertaking it was.

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「There isn't much information……」

Speaking of what he managed to learn, it was that the girl was a new student who enrolled this year at the same time with the princess, and that she was younger than Rody.

In addition she was a daughter of a baronet house and her name was [Aria].

Learning that she had the same name was a great gain for him, but other than that there was nothing else that he knew.

Why was a daughter of low ranked noble was serving the princess as her maid?

Why was a daughter of low ranked noble undertaking a job of exterminating monstrous person?

Was that girl really the same person with the [Aria] that he knew……?

After all in this country there were thousands of low ranked noble. Even so someone who got as far as getting selected to be the princess's maid should

be a known quantity but, nobody within Rody's circle of friends knew about her.

The girl was a low ranked noble, so a middle ranked noble like Rody could simply ask her directly but, the surrounding area of that girl and the princess was turning into a mysterious void space with how the girl's glare was driving back the middle ranked nobles and high ranked nobles who wanted to approach the princess, so Rody couldn't even get close to her.

.

「Forget about that Rody. Let's go take a look at the first year girls.」

「We might be able to approach them now.」

Rody's friends were telling him to not fall in love with such flower on a high peak and turn his gaze to the nearby flowers instead.

This was at the time when the new students' outdoor field trip had gotten mysteriously cancelled. In exchange the ball that should be held at summer would be held early just for the first years. The new students were currently being giddy because of that.

But a lot of the new students were still unable to dance well because the event got moved forward, and the ball would be held only for the new students so it was unrelated with second year students like Rody and his friends but…….

「We're going to offer to teach the new female students how to dance.」

「I see!」

Rody said *I see* not because he was agreeing with such thinking, but because he believed that Aria who was a low ranked noble and also a new student would be unused with dancing too. He wondered if he could use that as an impetus to have a talk with her.

But——

「There's no opening……」

In the end the fact that he wouldn't be able to arrive at where Aria was without somehow breaking through the environment that surrounded the princess still hadn't changed.

Certainly Aria herself also left no opening but, even more troublesome than that was the "atmosphere" that was making it hard for male to approach.

Even Rody had never imagined that her highness the princess would use her authority to forbid any male to approach in order to protect her attendant who was just a low ranked noble.

Even so Rody kept waiting for a chance persistently.

After all in this very vast sorcery academy, it would be difficult to even search for the person herself if not for the giddy atmosphere and the ready-made excuse of doing dance practice.

And then that persistence produced result in an unexpected way.

.

「……Rody? What are you doing?」

It wasn't the case that Rody was able to make contact. Instead he got apprehended by Aria in a deserted place as a suspicious person who was prowling near the princess.

「A-Aria! You're really the Aria who I knew aren't you!?」

Rody got pushed on a wall with his neck grabbed just like the first time they met. After that he yelled like that.

Aria too didn't remember him immediately. Perhaps it was her action of slamming Rody on the wall that jogged her memory about him.

「Obviously. What are you saying? Also you haven't answered my question.」

She wasn't threatening him with knife or showering him with killing intent. Aria too must be making consideration here because he was an old acquaintance.

Rody's face automatically turned red from seeing the face of such beauty glaring on him from so close. He averted his face from Aria, making Aria's gaze turned severe.

「Suspicious.」

「I'm not suspicious!」

「Then why were you spying on Elena-sama?」

「W-wrong! That was, umm……I want to meet you……」

Rody too unconsciously confessed from the intense questioning. Perhaps his inability to go against Aria had been engraved into his heart since that day in his childhood.

Rody too had played various simulations in his head about what he would do when talking to Aria.

They were together only for a short time, even so it wouldn't be strange for him to call her his childhood friend, and both of them had grown up. If they could have a lovely reunion if not a dramatic one, perhaps there would be something blazing forming between them. He had such hope.

But, their reunion ended up being something like this. However, perhaps him being blunt here instead of poorly trying to affect a stylish air could possibly make Aria feel conscious of him too?

「Right. Then nice timing. I have no partner with suitable height, so accompany me with my dance training.」

「Eh……」

But, Aria easily accepted his excuse and dragged Rody by his collar to the practice area without the slightest changed in her expression. For Aria too, someone who she had no need to be reserved with was precious.

Unexpectedly it was his “method” for talking to her that got achieved instead of his objective, but his objective was more or less achieved.

.

Aria, she’s actually a noble huh……

Aria learned the female part in dance after several hour of training, so the training didn’t continue anymore after that day, but it didn’t change the fact that he managed to form a common ground with her.

Aria too was a daughter of baronet……he heard from a well-informed person that there was also a rumor that her family apparently got promoted to be a baron house. There were talks that perhaps this promotion to middle ranked noble was in preparation to make Aria into a candidate of the princess’s close aide.

In that case she would be a baron just like him. A middle ranked noble just like him. Perhaps they would be able to get along even more easily than before? Rody thought lightly, but then he noticed that there would also be no obstacle at all if they both had the same status.

……N-no. After all I’m Aria’s friend you know? So it’s not like I’m not allowed to be concerned about that girl yeah……

When Rody realized it he had spent his last allowance to send a distant message to his father to ask about the engagement status of Leyton House’s daughter.

If he really wasn’t concerned then he could just send normal letter where student would be given a discount, but for some reason the thought of that didn’t even cross Rody’s mind.

He continued to wait for the reply with impatient feeling. Then two days later, a distant message from his father finally arrived but it only contained a single sentence.

.

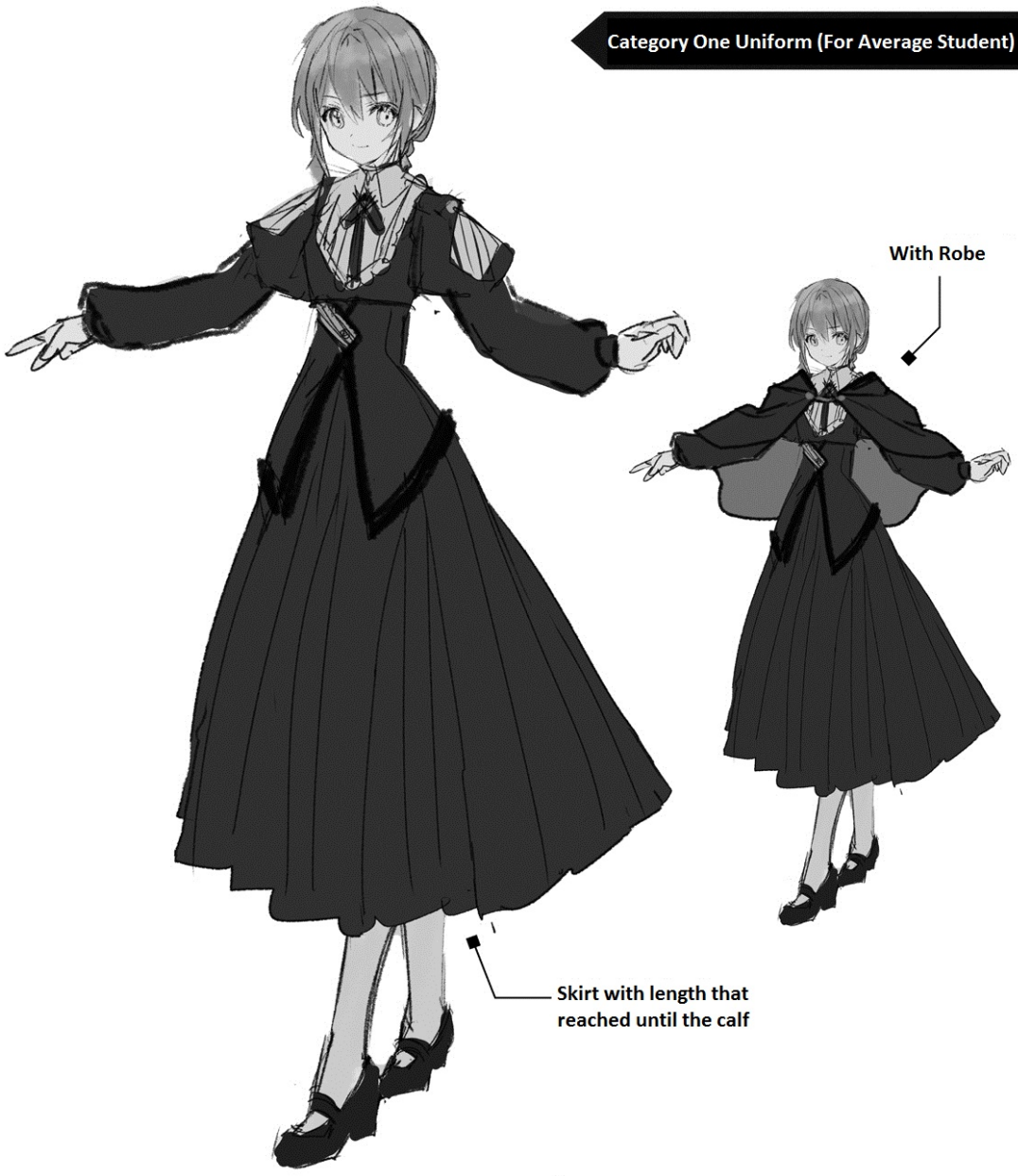
Give it up

.

What the hell is thissss!

The agonizing days of Rody boy would still continue.

Category One Uniform (For Average Student)

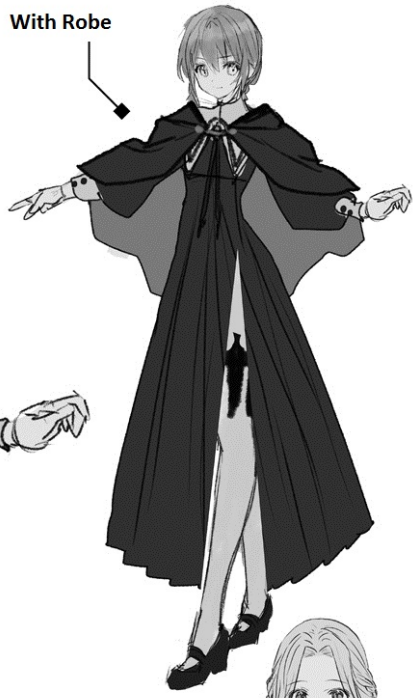


Royal Sorcery Academy's uniform have crimson base color. It was divided into three categories. First category for the general student, second category for high ranked noble, and third category for servant. Aria had the first and third category uniform, but she wore third category uniform when doing activity as Elena's aide.

Category Three Uniform (For Servant)

Skirt that reached until ankle

With Robe



Category Two Uniform

(High Ranked Noble - Robe Only)

Aristocratic Class Settings

本編内の貴族が持つ権力や役職を、現代に（大まかに）当て嵌めた設定。
※本編独自のもので、現実の貴族とは異なる部分があります。

【上級貴族】

領地を統治し、中級以下の貴族家を
寄子として取りまとめる貴族。

王家	旧家、財閥系。内閣と首相。 国軍総大将。
公爵	旧家。県知事。警察署長と裁判所。 大臣の役職を持つ国会議員を兼ねる。
辺境伯	侯爵と同等。この作品においてダンドール家とメルローズ家は、東京都知事や大阪府知事ほどの経済力と発言力を持つ。大臣の役職を持つ国会議員を兼ねる。
侯爵	政令指定都市や国際空港を有する県知事。 警察署長と裁判所。国会議員を兼ねる。
伯爵	県知事。警察署長と裁判官。 国会議員を兼ねる。

【中級貴族】

領地を統治し、下級貴族家を
寄子として取りまとめる貴族。

子爵	政令指定都市の市長。 警察署長と裁判官を兼ねる。
男爵	市長と警察署長、裁判官を兼ねる。

【下級貴族】

国家や貴族家に仕える文官や騎士。
国家に功績を認められた個人。

準男爵	町長と警察署長、市会議員や簡易裁判所を兼ねる。
名誉貴族 （一代貴族）	町の有名企業オーナー。 町会議員を兼ねる。
士爵 （騎士爵）	村長もしくは地主。 町会議員と交番を兼ねる。

Special SS - One Hundred Years Adventurer 2 [Rainbow Sword]

Bam!

Gelf-chan, I’m home-!

Oh myy, Samantha-chan. You haven’t grown at all like usual.

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU CALLING PIPSQUEAAAKKKKK!?

Samantha entered after kicking open the shop’s door and displayed a well arranged conversation with the shop owner Gelf.

It had been several years since Samantha and the other two left their rural village and became adventurer.

Then why did they end up [home]? The reason was because the three of them were adventurer at the capital, but the area around the capital had the knights and soldiers to solve any simple incident, so there was no work for rookie to do there.

In the first place the adventurer guild there was a place for adventurers from all over the places who had confidence in their skill to gather. People with good reputation received request from noble or merchant, while those without any good reputation headed toward the large scale dungeon at the south of the capital.

There were some errands that rookies could do, which could give them some small change. This kind of job was intended for student of the sorcery academy. When Samantha and co were unable to keep doing such job, then

would head to the beginning floors of the dungeon to hunt the monsters there.

「We have become rank 3! We can also take job in the capital now-」

「My, congratulations! We have to celebrate then.」

「We are also adults now, so we need to make our equipments look mature too!」

「I guess……」

Samantha and the other two had become 15 years old, an age that considered as grownup among human race. But……even though those with a lot of mana should grow quicker than those who weren't, Samantha only looked like a twelve years old girl no matter how other looked at her.

Human with a lot of mana normally would grow to look like around twenty years old if they were male and around seventeen years old if they were female until their actual age caught up, and from there the growth would switch to become a slowing down of their aging.

It wasn't like Samantha's mana was lacking. Her mana value wouldn't be inferior even when compared to a royal court sorcerer.

And yet why was she staying tiny like this……?

In Samantha's case there was also her unbalanced diet but, Gelf hypothesized that because her mana value was already high ever since she was a child, perhaps the growth switching period also came far earlier for her. Gelf looked at the pipsqueak Samantha with pity in his eyes.

Also the clothes that Gelf created for Samantha and Miranda had childish design too this time.

「Dalton and Mira-chan aren't together with you?」

「Dalton is at the guild-! As for Mira……Mira-?」

「Uu~~~」

Looking carefully, there was Miranda looking this way from behind the entrance. She was groaning cautiously like a cat that got found out sneaking in.

「Mira-chan, don't be scared and come in.」

「You're scary no matter how I look at you!」

Gelf was a craftsman who created cute equipments for female. He was a splendid male rock dwarf.

Even though several years had passed since Miranda first ran into him, she still wasn't used to Gelf who was wearing high heels made from golden thread and dress that displayed his bushy chest hair. ──Or rather, Dalton who got winked at every time he came here also wouldn't come here and made up an excuse every time to avoid coming, so in reality Samantha was the only one who was used to Gelf.

Miranda who was a forest elf had slow growth. Her appearance was like a twelve years old child just like Samantha.

Gelf had been having expectation at Miranda ever since Samantha introduced her to him that one day she would grow to have a model body style that was expected from an elf.

But in reality Samantha was still a pipsqueak even after she became of age, while Miranda's growth was slow which was something that couldn't be helped, but he got the feeling that she was gradually turning plumper every time she came here.

Gelf had a bad premonition so he wanted to take charge of Miranda's health management, but Miranda was scared of Gelf, perhaps because of the racial relationship between elf and dwarf that was a bit not good.

「Putting that aside……Mira-chan, what is that cord?」

Miranda who was still acting like a menacing cat toward Gelf was holding something like a leather cord. It was extending until outside the entrance that was still left wide open.

When that was pointed out, Miranda forgot even her fear and puffed out her
country bumpkin aura
(non-existent) chest with the unique arrogance of elf that lived in the forest in full display.

「You have sharp eyes for a rock dwarf! If you really insist that much then this me shall──ouchhh!?」

Samantha pinched Miranda's side with all her strength while she was in the middle of talking. She then snatched the cord from the hand of Miranda while she was shrieking and writhing in pain. Then she puffed out her (mostly non-existent) chest in Miranda's place.

「Gelf-chan, you noticed at great timing! Astonishingly we made a comrade-!」

「Is that so-!?」

Gelf's eyes opened wide in surprise when he heard Samantha's words.

She had formed an adventurer party, and they also went to the capital partly in order to search for comrade. Such story wasn't anything really strange or anything, yet Gelf was acting so surprised because of a reason.

The three searched for adventurer to become their comrade normally when they first came to the capital. But it was pointless to accept beginner into their party because they couldn't keep up with the three, while adventurer with some strength felt hesitation to join seeing Miranda and Samantha who had childish look like this.

Anyone who approached them despite those concerns was only dangerous people who were targeting the two beautiful girls despite their childish look. Those people were problematic even before considering whether they could become their comrade or not.

Like that they kept gradually putting off searching for new comrade and continued adventuring with just the three of them, but they finally found a comrade in a city with dungeon.

「Come iiin」

Samantha said that and pulled on the cord. Then “something” that was as tall as Samantha and Miranda entered into the shop. The cord was connected to a band that looked like a collar around their neck.

「Woof」

They yipped like that.

「……What’s this?」

「Eh? Gelf-chan, isn’t it cute?」

Perhaps it was “human”. Surely it was a “demihuman”. Most likely it was a “beastman”.

「This child, is he a dog beastman?」

「Perhaps?」

Their super fluffy hair grew uncontrollably until it covered their eyes and hid the color of their eyes. Their large ears were dangling down limply. Their whole body was slightly dirty. They were wearing loose clothes that concealed even their hands. Because of that Gelf couldn’t see how old they were, much less their gender.

When he asked Samantha how they became her comrade…

「This child suddenly snatched Mira’s candy in the middle of the city. The two of us spent a whole day chasing him before finally catching him using sorcery and spirit magic! Right?」

「Woof」

Gelf wondered which part of that story contained the reason that made this being became their comrade. Then Samantha turned around with a smug expression and the beastman child replied to her with a word that sounded like a dog's bark.

In short, a kid from the slum or from somewhere else snatched a candy, then the kid ran away from the forest hunter Miranda and the fast legged Samantha for one whole day. Apparently Samantha evaluated such capability highly and captured (scouted) the kid (without asking).

「I think his strength is around rank 2 or higher. That's why Gelf-chan. Do you have any scout equipment that seem fitting for him?」

「……What's his name?」

「Your name?」

「Woof」

「……It's Francois Josephine.」

「You decided that name randomly just now right-!? You definitely made that up from his barking right!?」

「Woof」

「He said he's fine with that name.」

「Aah geez! I get it! I'll do it! I'll give him a bath, so come over here, errr……Fran-chan!」

「Woof」

.

Around that time, at the adventurer guild──.

「Mumumuu~~」

The mountain dwarf boy Dolton was staring on a bulletin board by himself while crossing his arms.

He was fifteen years old. He was still too young both as a dwarf or even as a human race, but the pressure that he was radiating was pushing away even the adventurers around him. Nobody would get near him.

His height was a head shorter compared to adult human. But the thickness of his muscles was several times greater than the other adventurers there.

Such lump of compressed muscles was glaring at the board with a horrible expression, so anyone with normal nerve didn't want to get closer. But there was also a reason why Dolton was making that kind of face.

□None……□

Adventurer guild wasn't just a place to take job or sell material, but also a place to search for comrade.

But the board only had material collection request from the merchant guild and a party participation request from a human that they had refused previously.

Despite appearance, the party of Dolton and the other two was quite famous.

A party that was made up from a dwarf, an elf, and a human. Furthermore the two girls in it looked like children. The decent adventurers suspected whether it was a party with that kind of preference and kept them away at respectful distance, while only deviants would approach them.

Dolton who was the self-proclaimed sole person with common sense inside the party aimed to have a male adventurer with good head on his shoulder to join their party so such rumor could be wiped away, but Samantha dragged a beastman kid whose gender was still unclear to him and blabbed that the kid would join their party.

No, certainly if the kid had the physical ability to get away from Samantha and Miranda despite their use of sorcery, they were certainly a good prospect to become their scout, but Dolton couldn't erase the bad premonition that he was feeling no matter what. He wondered if it was just his imagination.

Besides if the beastman kid was actually a girl, Dolton who was the only one in the party who was showing a noticeable growth would be put under even heavier suspicion that he had that kind of preference.

It was with such worry that he was staring hard at the board hoping that there might be something that he overlooked there, but it seemed that god hadn't abandoned this boy in distress.

「Dolton-san, there's this male swordsman who wish to join your party……」

「……What……did you say」

The receptionist lady timidly called out to him. According to her, there was this young swordsman who was younger than Dolton and the others in his party. He was too honest of a kid and there was a risk that he would be preyed on if he got introduced to a bad party, so the receptionist lady thought that perhaps he could be entrusted (just barely) to the party of Dalton whose members were around the same age with and also had no bad rumor (except the rumor of their eccentricity).

「Yes-. Thank you for this chance to introduce myself, my name is Rook, Dolton-san!」

The one who said that before offering his hand was a handsome boy with black hair and blue eyes.

It seemed that he was born from a good family and had courteous behavior. Why was this kind of person picked an improper job like becoming an adventurer?

「I’m going to graduate from the sorcery academy next year, but I don’t want to become a knight like my brothers. I want to do a job where I can be closer to the populace!」

「Oo……」

His existence was dazzling. If he was a student of the sorcery academy then he should be a noble, furthermore if he could also use sorcery then he should have the strength of rank 2.

But, a noble becoming an adventurer smell like trouble, and some normal adventurers would even feel like they got a burden foisted on their hands to accept such person. However──

「My best regards! Rook, I welcome you to our party!」

Dolton didn’t ask for any details and shook Rook’s hand firmly.

Noble? One who was ignorant of the ways of the world? That didn’t matter. Rook didn’t seem like someone who held prejudice toward demihuman, his personality was decent, and his presence would serve to prevent the society from looking at Dolton with suspicion, furthermore his look also seemed like Samantha’s type and would divert her attention away from Dolton. With all those, Dolton didn’t care of anything else.

「Ah, yes. My best re──」

「Dolton!」

The moment Rook was going to give an affirmative reply while looking a bit creeped out, a girl’s voice reverberated through the adventurer guild.

「Geh, Samantha.」

「Listen, listen, Dolton! That Francois Josephine is really amazing!」

「Who’s that!?」

「Hey, Fran, come!」

「Woof」

That “bark” certainly belonged to the beastman street urchin who Samantha picked up, but their appearance had changed completely.

The fluffy hair that had been left to grow uncontrollably now became a bobcut with milk tea color. The large ears that were dangling on both sides of the head also got put to the forefront with a lovely look. The kid’s eyes were still hidden by the hair bang but the face that was exposed looked well-proportioned. The kid was wearing a newly purchased loose shirt and a miniskirt. The healthy legs covered with tights that extended down from there really drew attention.

This Fran who had transformed into a beautiful beastgirl who looked around twelve years old was the result of Gelf’s full efforts.

「So she’s really a female!」

「It’s fine! We had also bought short bloomers from Gelf-chan’s shop!」

「I don’t care about that!」

「Ah, we also asked Gelf-chan to create new equipments for us while we were there.」

「I didn’t ask! Listen to what I’m saying!」

Not only they bought new clothes for Fran, Samantha also purchased a robe that wholly exposed her upper arms and legs now. As for Miranda……

「Uu~~~~~~~~!」

She now looked like a flower fairy with the outfit that used a lot of white and pink clothes in it. She was hiding behind Fran in embarrassment.

「What’s with that attire……」

It’s fine, it’s free after all!

Uwaaaahn!

Gelf provided equipments free of charge for the two of them in exchange of them being his model, so Miranda whose pocket money ran out for snacks couldn’t possibly refuse……

Woof

Miranda had her hair petted by Fran while munching on the sweet that was given to her. The middle-aged adventurers around them were looking at that scene with warm gaze.

I myself managed to find a swordsman to join our party! Ain’t that right, Rook!

Hee!

Dolton slapped Rook’s shoulder and Samantha stared at him with a burning gaze. It made Rook who was in a daze to jerk in surprise and took a step back.

N-no, I suddenly remember that I have an urgent business……

But Dolton’s hold on Rook’s shoulder was firm and he was unable to escape. Then Samantha dragged him into the “rest area” at the back of the guild so they could be alone. One hour later……

……hics hics

Rook also decides to join us happily!

With Samantha’s “persuasion”, the red faced Rook whose clothes seemed disheveled after their talk officially became a comrade of Dolton and co.

Also it was the moment when Samantha caught her first future husband.

.

Like this the one hundred years adventure of comrades with various colors of personality like rainbow──the adventurers [Rainbow Sword] began.